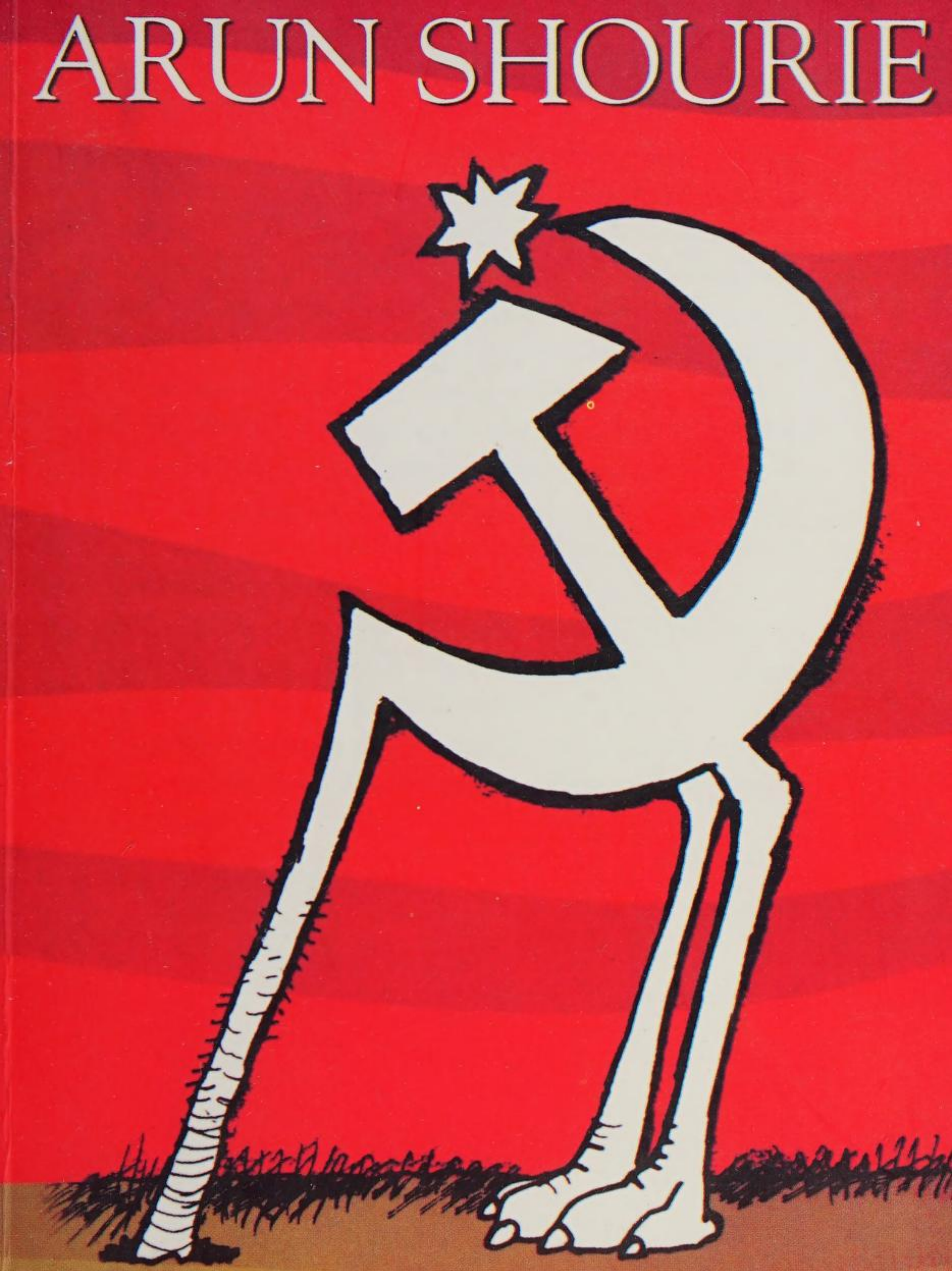
ARUN SHOURIE



EMINENT HISTORIANS

THEIR TECHNOLOGY, THEIR LINE, THEIR FRAUD

SHOUT
SHARE
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ARUN SHOURIE, among India's best known commentators on current and political affairs, backs his distinctive writing, his conscientiously independent perspective with rigorous analysis and meticulous research. Born in Jalandhar in 1941, he studied at Modern School and St. Stephen's College in Delhi, and obtained his doctorate in Economics from the University of Syracuse, USA. He has been an economist with the World Bank, a consultant to the Planning Commission and Editor of *The Indian Express.* His writings have gained him a vast following across the country, as well as several national and international honours. Among these are the *Padma Bhushan,* the *Magsaysay Award,* the *Dadabhai Naoroji Award,* the *Astor Award,* the *K.S. Hegde Award* and the *International Editor of the Year Award.* The Federation of Indian Publishers recently conferred *The Freedom to Publish Award* on him. At present Arun Shourie is a member of the Rajya Sabha.

This is his fifteenth book.

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For our parents
For our Adit
For Anita

Taat maat guru sakha tu....

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Introduction

In June-July, 1998, progressives kicked up quite a racket. The Government has packed the Indian Council of Historical Research with pro-Ram Mandir historians, they shouted. It has surreptitiously altered the aims and objectives of the Council, they shouted.

As is their wont, they had sparked the commotion by giving wind to a concoction.

As is their wont too, they were charging others with *planning* to do in *some undefined future* what they had themselves been actually doing for decades – that is, write history to a purpose.

The commotion led me to look into their record – to look at what they had made of an institution like the Indian Council of Historical Research, and to read the textbooks they had authored.

Small scandals turned up too. So accustomed have we become to crores being raked off that the amounts mentioned in this narrative will seem less than the pilfering of pick-pockets. That is so in part because our standards have become so lax. And in part because the real crime of these eminences does not lie in the loss they have inflicted in terms of money. It lies in the condition to which they have reduced institutions. It lies in their dereliction – because of which Projects that were important for our country have languished. It lies even more in the use to which they have put those institutions.

They have used them to have a comfortable time, of course. They have used them to puff up each other's reputations, of course. But the worst of it is that they have used their control of these institutions to pervert public discourse, and thereby derail public policy.

They have made India out to have been an empty land – filled by successive invaders. They have made present-day India, and Hinduism even more so, out to be a zoo – an agglomeration of assorted, disparate specimens. No such thing as "India", just a geographical expression, just a construct of the British; no such than as Hinduism, just a word used by Arabs to describe the assortment they encountered, just an invention of the communalists to impose a uniformity – that has been their stance. For this they have blackened the Hindu period of our history, and, as we shall see, strained to whitewash the Islamic period. They have denounced ancient India's social system as the epitomy of oppression, and made totalitarian ideologies out to be egalitarian and just.

They have belittled our ancient culture and exaggerated syncretistic elements which survived and made them out to have been an entire "culture", the "composite culture" as they call it. Which culture isn't? And all the while they have taken care to hide the central facts about these common elements in the life of our people : that they had survived in spite of the most strenuous efforts spread over a thousand years of Islamic rulers and the *ulema* to erase them, that they had survived in spite of the sustained efforts during the last hundred and fifty years of the Missionaries and British rulers to make us forget and shed these elements, that the elements had survived their efforts to instead inflame each section to see its "identity" and essence in factors which, if internalised, would set it apart. Most of all, these intellectuals and the like have completely diverted public view from the activities in our own day of organisations like the *Tabhligi Jamaat* and the Church which are exerting

every nerve, and deploying uncounted resources to get their adherents to discard every practice and belief which they share with their Hindu neighbours.

These intellectuals and their patrons have worked a diabolic inversion: the inclusive religion, the pluralist spiritual search of our people and land, they have projected as intolerant, narrow-minded, obscurantist; and the exclusivist, totalitarian, revelatory religions and ideologies – Islam, Christianity, Marxism-Leninism – they have made out to be the epitomes of tolerance, open-mindedness, democracy, secularism!

This has been their real crime. It has also been a bit of a feat. For they have been just a few : during the Ayodhya controversy, for instance, every other week a press statement would appear in favour of the stand of the Babri Masjid Action Committee – one week over the names of "eminent historians," the next over the signatures of "distinguished social scientists," and the week after that in the name of "leading intellectuals" ! But they would always be the same lot. Always the same small lot : six in one statement, eight in the next; their high was 42. Once. But what commotion they have been able to create, and what mischief.

They have been able to do so because what they were advancing – for instance, the Marxist "thesis" they were parroting in their textbooks – was in accord with the temper of the times. Because their kind were in critical positions in professions like journalism and universities. And because the rulers reckoned that to garner votes it would be politic to dress up in progressive plumes : patronising persons who had taken out a copyright, so to say, on the progressive hue was accordingly useful.

Most of all, they were able to work their mischief because of the control they came to acquire over institutions.

Times have changed : the committed progressive of yesterday is the unthinking conservative today.

The needs of the rulers have changed : who can fool the

masses today by nationalising banks and parading certificates from progressives?

The Theory in which progressives preened about had been shown decades ago to be without basis. At that time no one listened. But today no one invokes it! For it has floundered on the one test the progressives had said alone mattered: the test of practice. Whatever the theoretical imperfections, whatever the empirical evidence, the one thing that counts is that it has worked in practice – in the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe, in China: that was their argument. And as only those facts about these countries were facts which they certified, the argument could scarcely be countered. Today that very argument works to the opposite effect: whatever the logical coherence you claim for it, whatever scraps of empirical evidence you adduce in its favour, the one thing that counts is that it has failed in practice!

So, the fashions are changing, the patronage of rulers is evaporating, their Holy Books have been repudiated in their Meccas.

All that remains is their hold over governmental institutions. The remedy is two-fold. Enable a multitude of other institutions to come up : for this, a few changes in laws, some marginal incentives for setting up and running foundations, and faith in others – that persons outside the State also are eager to do good by the country – are all we need. Second, loosen the hold over existing institutions of eminences of the kind surveyed here: for this all that is needed is to document what they have made of these institutions.

The historians

A characteristic concoction

"Rational vs. National," screamed the headline of the new pall-bearer of secularism, the magazine *Outlook*. "Fresh evidence available with *Outlook* reveals that not only has the ICHR [the Indian Council of Historical Research] been packed with 'sympathizers,'" the story announced, "but a new statement of objectives or resolution [*sic.*] has been added, changing certain key words from the original Memorandum of Association of 1972, legitimised by an Act of Parliament. While the original Memorandum of Association states that ICHR's aims would be to give 'rational' direction to historical research and foster 'an objective and scientific writing of history,' the new resolution, which will be included in the *Gazette of India,* states that ICHR now seeks to give a 'national' direction to an 'objective and national presentation of history.' So, 'rational' has been changed to 'national', and 'scientific' too has been changed to 'national'...."

"Tampering with history," proclaimed the old pall-bearer, *The Hindu*. "Apprehensions of this kind [that the fabled 'Sangh *parivar*' is out to rewrite history] have been substantiated by a related decision. The resolution by the Ministry of Human Resources Development – nodal Ministry under which the ICHR comes – that details the new nominations carries with it an amendment to the Memorandum of Association by which the ICHR was set

up; while the institution was set up 'to foster objective and scientific writing of history such as will inculcate an informed appreciation of the country's national and cultural heritage,' the new Government's mandate is that the ICHR will give a 'national direction' to an 'objective and national presentation and interpretation of history.' This amendment is certainly not just a matter of semantics. Instead, one can clearly see in this an intention on the part of the BJP-led Government to rewrite history...."

The next issue of the CPI(M) mouthpiece, *Peoples Democracy*, reproduced this editorial ! And carried with it an article by one of the ring-leaders, K. N. Panikkar. "Saffronisation of historical research," proclaimed the heading. Panikkar repeated the charge of the word "rational" having been replaced by "national". He added another: the Memorandum of Association of the ICHR mentions five objectives, he said, but the Resolution put out by the Saffron-brigade mentions only two.

Thus, the charge rested on three bits of "evidence": that the Memorandum of Association of the ICHR had been changed; second, that a word – "rational" – in the Resolution announcing the new members of the ICHR had been surreptitiously replaced by another word – "national"; third, that while the original Memorandum of Association had specified five objectives for the ICHR, the new Resolution cut out three of these.

Having been educated by *The Hindu* that the "nodal ministry" for the matter was the Ministry of Human Resources Development, I rang up the Secretary of that Ministry. Has the Memorandum of Association of the ICHR been changed?, I asked. No, he said. It has not been changed, he said.

And then about the Resolution announcing the new members. The allegation, you will recall, was that the aim which in the Memorandum of Association is, "to give a national direction to an objective and RATIONAL

presentation and interpretation of history....," had been altered in the Resolution to read, "to give a national direction to an objective and NATIONAL presentation and interpretation of history...."

I have before me the statement of the Ministry of Human Resources Development [No. F 30-28/86-U3] dated 6th October, 1987, that is of *eleven years ago*. It gives the text of the Resolution of the Government of India announcing the new members – announcing, among other things, that Irfan Habib is being appointed as Chairman with retrospective effect from 9 September, 1986. The corresponding expression in it is, "to give a national direction to an objective and NATIONAL presentation and interpretation of history...."

I have before me the statement of the Ministry of Human Resources Development [No. F. 30-13/89-U3] dated 15th May, 1991. It gives the text of the Resolution of the Government of India announcing the new members – announcing, among other things, that Irfan Habib is being re-appointed as Chairman with retrospective effect from 12 March, 1990. The corresponding expression in it is, "to give a national direction to an objective and NATIONAL presentation and interpretation of history...."

To test my hypothesis yet again, I looked for and obtained the immediately preceding statement of the Ministry. It bore the number F. 30-3/94-U.3, and was dated 8th September, 1994. Like the others, it furnished the text of the Resolution of the Government of India announcing the new members – announcing, among other things, that Ravinder Kumar, another "historian" of the same hue, was being appointed as Chairman with retrospective effect from 8 September, 1990. The corresponding expression in it was, "to give a national direction to an objective and NATIONAL presentation and interpretation of history...."

That is how far I was able to get on my own. I requested the Secretary of the Ministry: could he please request

someone to look up Resolutions of the earlier years, and see whether they contained anything different? Could he help me trace when this "alteration" got made?

The Secretary was able to trace Resolutions going back up to 1978 – that is, *twenty years*. Each of them carried the very same words !

The research of the Secretary and his colleagues established that – to reproduce the word the Secretary used – the whole mystery had arisen from a "typographical error": some typist banging away on his typewriter some twenty-odd years ago typed "rational" as "national". As each typist, when asked to type out the subsequent Resolution, copied the preceding one, that word continued to be typed as "national" year after year. The leftists inferred no conspiracy. But, lo and behold, now that a BJP Government was in power, inferring conspiracies – to use their favourite phrase – was a historical necessity. It was objective history ! It was progressive methodology ! I half-expected them to put on their Sherlock Holmes caps again, and establish that the Governments of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, of Rajiv Gandhi, of V. P. Singh, of Narasimha Rao had all been in league with the RSS, and therefore parties to this grave conspiracy !

I then rang up Vinod Mehta, the editor of *Outlook* and President of the Editors Guild of India. "But the reporter says she has the text and everything," he said. I narrated what I had found. He promised to check and get back to me. When we talked again he said he had sent me the text of the Resolution. But that was the current one. My point had been that the "change" on which *Outlook* had built its story had existed in all Resolutions for at least twenty years. He said he would get back to me. He never did. Nor did senior journalists of two other publications that had built their stories on the fabrication, and who, after I requested them to ascertain the basis of their accounts, had promised to get back to me.

The exact same thing held for that fabrication of K. N. Panikkar: about five objectives having become two. In every single one of the Resolutions – including the 1994 Resolution under which Panikkar had himself been nominated to the ICHR, a Resolution he can find printed at page 342 of *The Gazette of India*, October 22, 1994 – the exact same sentences had been used: only those objectives had been mentioned as were mentioned in the Resolution issued in 1998 ! And another thing: if an RSS publication publishes even an interview with me, that is further proof of my being communal; but so tough are the hymen of these progressives that, even when they contribute signed articles to publications of the Communist Party, their virginity remains intact !

Such forgeries, such allegations are the standard technology of this school. Fabricating conspiracy theories is their well-practised weapon. And they have a network: stories containing the same "facts" about the ICHR had figured prominently in paper after paper. In *The Asian Age* on June 6: "ICHR revamp has RSS tilt." In the *Indian Express* on June 8: "Historians cry foul as HRD Ministry paints ICHR saffron." In the *Hindustan Times* on June 9: "Historians see saffron in ICHR appointments." In *The Hindu* editorial of June 12: "Tampering with history." In *Outlook* of June 22 which was on the stands on June 15. The front-men having spoken, the ventriloquist had stepped forth – the *Peoples Democracy* of June 21: "Saffronisation of historical research."

The associated charge, repeated in *Outlook* and all the other publications, was that historians who had now been nominated to the ICHR were ones who supported the proposition that there had been a Ram-temple at Ayodhya before it was replaced by the Babri Mosque. Assume that the charge was entirely correct. What about the members who had not been re-nominated? They were the intellectual guides and propagandists of the Babri Masjid Action

Committee. They represented it at the meetings Mr. Chandrashekhar's Government had convened for settling the matter by evidence. That was an outstanding initiative of Mr. Chandrashekhar: for such contentious issues ought to be dissolved in the acid of evidence. These leftist "historians" had attended the initial meetings. They had put together for and on behalf of the Committee "documents". It had been a miscellaneous pile. And it had become immediately evident that this pile was no counter to the mass of archaeological, historical and literary evidence which the VHP had furnished, that in fact the "documents" these guides of the Babri Committee had piled up further substantiated the VHP's case. These "historians", having undertaken to attend the meeting to consider the evidence presented by the two sides, just did not show up !

It was this withdrawal which aborted the initiative that the Government had undertaken of bringing the two sides together, of introducing evidence and discourse into the issue. Nothing but nothing paved the way for the demolition as did this running away by these "historians". It was the last nail: no one could be persuaded thereafter that evidence or reason would be allowed anywhere near the issue.

Not only were these "historians" the advisers of the Babri Masjid Action Committee, its advocates in the negotiations, they simultaneously issued all sorts of statements supporting the Babri Masjid Action Committee's case – which was the "case" they had themselves prepared ! A well-practised technique, if I may say so: they are from a school in which members have made each other famous by applauding each others books and "theses"!

And these very "historians" are cited as witnesses in the pleadings filed by the Sunni Waqf Board in the courts which are considering the Ayodhya matter !

Witness number 63: R.S. Sharma;
Witness number 64: Suraj Bhan;

Witness number 65: D.N. Jha;
Witness number 66: Romila Thapar;
Witness number 67: Athar Ali (since deceased); ....
Witness number 70: Irfan Habib;
Witness number 71: Shireen Moosvi, also from Aligarh Muslim University;
Witness number 72: B.N. Pandey (since deceased); ....
Witness number 74: R.L. Shukla; ....
Witness number 82: Sushil Srivastava; ....
Witness number 95: K.M. Shrimali;
Witness number 96: Suveera Jayaswal; ....
Witness number 99: Satish Chandra; ....
Witness number 101: Sumit Sarkar;
Witness number 102: Gyanendra Pandey; ....

Their deceitful role in Ayodhya – which in the end harmed their clients more than anyone else – was just symptomatic. For fifty years this bunch has been suppressing facts and inventing lies. How concerned they pretend to be today about that objective of the ICHR – to promote objective and rational research into events of our past ! How does this concern square with the guidelines issued by their West Bengal Government in 1989 which *Outlook* itself had quoted – "Muslim rule should never attract any criticism. Destruction of temples by Muslim rulers and invaders should not be mentioned"? But incorporating their wholesale fabrications of the destruction of Buddhist *vihars*, about the non-existent "Aryan invasion," that is mandatory – to question them is to be communal, chauvinist ! The capture of institutions like the ICHR has been bad enough, but in the end it has been a device. The major crime of these "historians" has been this partisanship: *suppresso veri, suggesto falsi*.

But these are not just partisan "historians". They are nepotists of the first order. I had documented several years ago the doings of some of them in regard to the appointments

in the Aligarh Muslim University. Their doings in the ICHR were true to pattern. How is it that over twenty five years persons from their school alone had been nominated to the ICHR? How come that Romila Thapar had been on the Council four times? Irfan Habib five times? Satish Chandra four times? S. Gopal three times?.... The same pattern held for the post of Chairman.

But we are getting ahead of the story: what was their answer when their fabrication – "rational changed to national" – was nailed? As, unlike Shourie, who, a resident of Delhi, is a BJP MP from U.P., I am not a Member of Parliament, wrote their spokesman, Panikkar, "I have no means to ascertain from the Ministry" whether what Shourie has written is true !

A much favoured device: when caught peddling a lie, insinuate that the other man is privileged ! And that, as you are from the toiling masses, you cannot ascertain whether the facts he has stated are true. Therefore, what you stated must stand as fact. Q.E.D. !

Eminent entrepreneurs !

"This is an old charge which keeps surfacing now and then," wrote one of those "eminent historians", K. N. Panikkar, in response to an article of mine – the charge that close to two crores had been spent on the "*Towards Freedom*" project of the Indian Council of Historical Research, and little had been achieved. "About a year back *Times of India* carried a front page story on this. The historians had then clarified through a public statement published in several newspapers, that they have not drawn any money from the ICHR and that they worked for five years purely in an honorary capacity. When he [that is, me] gets the information from the Ministry, if he does, that the editors have not taken any money, I would normally expect Shourie to tender a public apology. But given the intellectual honesty and cultural level reflected in his article, I do not think it would be forthcoming. The alternative of suing for defamation the likes of Shourie is below one's dignity. But I do expect at least the Ministry to make a public statement on the factual position."

Strong stuff, and definitive, one would think. It turns out that on 17 July, 1998, in answer to a question tabled in the Rajya Sabha, the Ministry stated that only one part of the project had been completed and published since the original volume of Dr. P. N. Chopra. This was the volume – in three parts – by Dr. Partha Sarthi Gupta covering 1943-44. In

answer to another question, the Ministry reported that "After publication of the Volume he was paid an honorarium of Rs. 25,000/- in September, 1997."

Dr. Partha Sarthi Gupta, in other words, was the one editor who had completed the work which he had undertaken. For that he had been paid Rs. 25,000. The others had not completed the work they had undertaken, they had therefore not been paid the Rs. 25,000 which were to be paid to them only when their volumes were completed and published. That is how our friend was proclaiming that they had been toiling as social workers – we have been working in an honorary capacity, we have not taken a penny !

Their not having collected the money because they had not completed the work apart, how much store should we set by their claim – in this case the claim that they had been toiling away as social workers?

Each of these persons had availed of staff and other facilities throughout these years – ostensibly for producing volumes under the *Towards Freedom Project*. Substantial sums of public funds had been spent on this staff and these facilities. Should these not be put to their account?

How many staff members and research assistants were used by these scholars?, I inquired. What amounts were spent on them? What is the status of the volumes the scholars were to produce?, I inquired. The answers of the ICHR for the period 1988/89 to 1997/98:

Scholar	*Research staff used**	*Amount spent*
Sumit Sarkar	1+5	Rs. 4,56,617
K. N. Panikkar	1+6	Rs. 4,84,973
Gyanendra Pandey	1+5	Rs. 3,15,522
Bipan Chandra	1+8	Rs. 1,19,691
Mushirul Hasan	1+11	Rs. 7,36,159
Partha S. Gupta	1+5	Rs. 4,47,625

Bimal Prasad	2+6	Rs. 4,70,567
Ravinder Kumar	1+6	Rs. 4,30,826
Basudev Chatterjee	12	Rs. 16,88,426

**The first digit indicates regular staff on the pay roll of the ICHR, and the second digit indicates the number of research staff engaged on consolidated salary.*

These were expenditures directly against their names, and on their recommendations. In addition, of course, were the Rs. 37,15,207 spent during the editorship of P. N. Chopra, the Rs. 7,87,484 spent during the first period of the editorship of S. Gopal. And as these sums totalled Rs. 97,23,097 only, there was an additional *crore* which had been spent on the project – that too could have been spent on the directions of these eminent scholars only. But "honorary", you must believe.

An afterword is in order to this sorry tale of the *Towards Freedom Project*. As far as history writing is concerned, few things could have been more important than to bring alive for subsequent generations what our leaders felt and did in the long struggle to wrest freedom for the country. And just see how these eminences have handled this responsibility: a project which was to have been completed in five years in a few lakhs has been dragged for twenty seven years, a crore and seventy-odd have been gobbled up in its name – and the volumes are still said to be on their way. This is gross dereliction – independent of what the volumes will contain, and what they would have left out.

The tale contains an institutional warning also: for this is not the first time that the project to write the history of the freedom movement has been hijacked, and eventually derailed. In the Introduction and Appendix to his three volume *History of the Freedom Movement in India*,[1] Dr. R.

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[1] R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India,* 1962, Second revised edition, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1971.

C. Majumdar recorded what happened to the original project – how at his instance the Indian Historical Records Commission passed a Resolution in February 1948 that a history of the country's struggle for freedom ought to be prepared; how the Education Ministry headed by Maulana Azad sat over the matter till Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of the country, nudged it ahead; how an Editorial Board was set up; how Majumdar was appointed Director for the project; how the first volume was prepared; how it met with the approval of the Editorial Board; how the Government, having stated in one breath that the volumes were well on their way to getting ready, alleged in the next that there had been some differences in the Board about the content of the first volume which had been circulated; how suddenly the Board was dissolved; and the project handed over to a previous Secretary of the Education Ministry; how some of the members turned coat....

The result? Mediocre volumes which no one reads, volumes which further what was then the official line....

By contrast the British produced their version through the *Transfer of Power* documents: we never wanted to stay, we wanted to leave as soon as possible, we laboured to prevent the partition of the country, we transferred power, freedom had not to be wrested from our hands.... There was the Indian side to the events. This was available at the time in the recollections of those who had led the movement against the British – for many of them were still alive; it was available in their private papers. The *Towards Freedom Project* was to garner this record. As control over institutions passed to the Leftists, the entire project was yoked to advancing their Line and Theses.

The moral is plain: do not rely on governments, do not rely on governmental institutions for national tasks; individuals, small groups dedicated to the country – they alone can do them for the country.

The *Towards Freedom Project* wasn't the only one on

which large amounts had been spent and which had not been completed. There was an "*Economic History of India Project*." Rs. *nineteen lakhs and fifty five thousand* had been spent on it. Nothing had been published as a result. Though, the Ministry told the Rajya Sabha, "according to the information furnished by the ICHR," two volumes of the project – on Railways and Agriculture – were "ready for the press".

In response to an Unstarred Question (number 3466) the Ministry also told the Rajya Sabha that "Professor Bipan Chandra was sanctioned a sum of Rs. 75,000/- during 1987-88 for the assignment entitled 'A History of the Indian National Congress'. A sum of Rs. 57,500/- [*fifty seven thousand five hundred*] has been released to him till 23.6.1989. The remaining balance of Rs. 17,500/- is yet to be released because a formal manuscript in this regard is yet to be received." A glimpse into how one must view the claim to have been "doing all this in a strictly honorary capacity". It is as if Bipan Chandra were to go about saying, "See, I have not even taken the Rs. 17,500/- which the ICHR still owes me." And do not miss that effort from the ICHR to help to the extent possible – "The remaining balance of Rs. 17,500/- is yet to be released *because a formal manuscript in this regard is yet to be received.*"

I, therefore, wrote to the Ministry: "Does this mean that some *informal* manuscript has been received? Or that *no* manuscript has been received? If the latter is the case, how is it that nine years having passed, the scholar having taken Rs. 57,500/- for a project and not having submitted the manuscript, no action has been taken?"

After a few reminders, the Ministry eventually wrote to say: ".... it has been confirmed by ICHR that no manuscript – *either formally or informally* – has been received so far." As regards the action taken, the Ministry said, information was being obtained from the ICHR.

Later I learnt that the Rs. 75,000/- which had been allotted

to this "eminent historian" for this project – *"the Oral History Project"* – had been but a part, a small part of the total take. Bipan Chandra was given in addition Rs. *Two Lakhs* by the ICSSR and Rs. *Four Lakhs* through the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Neither institution received any manuscript in return.

Actually this matter had become an issue when time came for this "eminent historian" to retire from the JNU. The University, naturally, could not do without his eminence. A proposal was, therefore, put up to engage him again after retirement. The then Registrar of the University pointed out that, according to the University's rules, the retirement dues etc. could not be settled, and a contract to engage Bipan Chandra again could not be entered into till the accounts for the *four lakhs* had been submitted, and that Bipan Chandra had studiously neglected to furnish the accounts. No accounts came. The then Vice-Chancellor papered over the matter.

As nothing but nothing had turned up in the ICHR in return for its grant, the second part of my query remained : what action had the ICHR taken in the matter? Eventually I was told, "No action has been initiated on this as Dr. Bipan Chandra is stated to be still working on the project." That was the position *nine years* after his eminence had collected the money !

From documents which have been furnished in response to my queries, it turns out that this is the pattern. The ICHR commenced a *National Movement Project* – to which I shall come in a moment – to document our freedom struggle from the mid-1850s. Bipan Chandra took Rs. 12,000/- to produce the volume covering 1885-86. Result? *Nothing has been heard of it since.* He took another Rs. 12,000/- for the volume covering 1932-34. Outcome? *"Not submitted,"* says the ICHR. Being eminent, Bipan Chandra is naturally in the circle of friends among whom the *Towards Freedom Project* was parcelled. To assist him to shoulder his onerous

load in this regard, the ICHR has employed over the years one "regular" staff member plus eight staff members "on consolidated salary". Result? *"Volume not submitted."*

But, to be fair, this pattern is not confined to this eminent historian alone. It has been the pattern for the entire institution manned and controlled by these "eminent historians".

V. N. Gadgil, the Congress member, asked a written question in the Rajya Sabha about the projects which had been undertaken by the ICHR, and what had happened to them. In its reply (to Unstarred Question number *3476 on 17 July 1998)* the Ministry of Human Resources Development stated, "According to the information furnished by the ICHR, three major projects – namely, 'Towards Freedom,' 'Dictionary of Inscriptions,' and the 'Economic History of India' – started between 1976 and 1992 have been continued during the last five years. These are in different stages of completion...."

The rat was there for everyone to see: Gadgil, after all, had not asked about "major projects," nor had he said anything about projects "started between 1972 and 1992." Therefore, I asked, "But what about the project for documenting the National Freedom Movement from 1857 to 1937? How many volumes were to be produced under it? To whom was each volume assigned? How much was paid to each scholar? How much has been spent on each volume? How many volumes have been produced under this project?"

The Ministry replied, ".... the Indian Council of Historical Research have stated that *no project was commissioned by them to document the National Movement between 1857 and 1937.*" What a foolish evasion ! All I had to do was to draw the attention of the Ministry to successive annual reports of the ICHR which had been presented to Parliament over two decades: report after report had listed this as one of the major projects which the ICHR had initiated ! Please

look at the account commencing from page 26 of the *Annual Report* for 1972-1973, I wrote; please look at the account commencing from page 16 of the *Annual Report* for 1973-1974, I wrote....

The result? Eventually, the Ministry conceded that such a project had indeed been undertaken. *Nineteen volumes* were to have been produced. The volumes were assigned to different scholars – our eminences as usual led the rest ! Rs. 12,000 were doled out for each volume. The result? Here, in the words of the ICHR, is a list of the period to be covered by the volume, the scholar to whom it was assigned, the money the scholar collected, and the result:

1. *Before 1857*: K. Rajayan: Rs. 12,000/-; *Submitted but not traceable.*
2. *1857-1885*: S. R. Mehrotra: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
3. *1885-1886:* Bipan Chandra: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
4. 1896-98: *Not assigned.*
5. *1899-1902*: B.R. Grover: Rs. 12,000/-; *Submitted and published.*
6. *1902-1903*: *Not assigned.*
7. *1903-1905*: *Not assigned.*
8. *1905-1907*: Sumit Sarkar: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
9. *1907-1909*: Sumit Sarkar: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
10. *1910-1915*: M.N. Das: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
11. *1915-1919*: T.K. Ravindran: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
12. *1919-1920*: V. N. Dutta: Rs. 12,000/-; *Submitted and published.*
13. *1920-1922*: Sita Ram Singh: Rs. 12,000/-; *Submitted, under production.*
14. *1922-1924*: Sreekumaran Nair: Rs. 12,000/-; *Submitted and published.*
15. *1924-1926*: Amba Prasad: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

16. *1927-1929*: Bimal Prasad: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
17. *1930-1931*: Bimal Prasad: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
18. 1932-1934: Bipan Chandra: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*
19. *1934-1937*: Gopal Krishna: Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

As you read the amounts, do remember that they were paid out in the mid-1970s, when they amounted to much, much more than they do in these days of scams.

In a communication Dr. S. R. Mehrotra points out that in his case he did not receive a penny, that the entire amount was paid directly to a colleague who was assisting him. His communication sheds light on the way the Council was brought to seed under the eminents. Dr. Mehrotra writes that he had initially been assigned the task of collecting documents relating to a brief two-three year period. Later this was extended to cover a period of thirty years. His colleague and he completed the collection, and had their manuscript ready almost twenty years ago. He pointed out to the ICHR that he had been asked to cover a period ten to fifteen times longer than that assigned to other scholars, that the typescript of the documents consequently extended over 3,000 pages. He said that for these reasons, the Council may publish the work in two or three parts instead of limiting it to just one volume.

"Years passed," he writes with a sheaf of correspondence to prove his point, "but, despite several reminders, the ICHR could not decide this simple issue." As a result the typescript has languished for twenty years. The project itself was forgotten till questions were asked about it now. And recall that the project was no less than documenting the country's struggle for freedom. What a comment on the sense of responsibility with which the

eminences have conducted the affairs of the Council!

And what about the project to document the Praja Mandal Movement, the freedom movement in the princely states?, I inquired. The requisite details are being collected by the ICHR, the Ministry wrote.

After a reminder, the Ministry wrote: "The ICHR had taken [*sic.*] such a project. *No further information is readily available.*" "Surely, you would not like to leave the matter at that," I had to write. "Was a large sum of public money not spent on the Project? Who had been assigned the Project? What has resulted from the large expenditure of public money?" Eventually, the ICHR furnished the details. These conformed to the norm, so to say: the Project was assigned to one of the key-point men of the "eminent historians" in the Council, R. C. Shukla. Staff was assigned. Materials are reported to have been collected between 1976 and 1982. A sum of Rs. *four lakhs and thirty five thousand* was spent. The net outcome? "*No publication has come out on PMM [the Praja Mandal Movements], to the best knowledge of the Council,*" wrote the Council.

What about the Project to document "Peasant Movements"?, I inquired. *Fourteen volumes* were to be produced, the ICHR wrote. Six of these were assigned among three scholars at Rs. 12,000/- per volume. *One* of these has been published. Two are listed as "*Not Submitted.*" And three as "*Submitted but not traceable.*"

What about the "Economic Data and Statistics Project," which was listed with such fan-fare in the *Annual Reports* till some years ago?, I asked. *Six* volumes were to be produced under it, the ICHR wrote. The authors, the subjects they were to cover in the volume assigned to them, the money which was paid to them, and the outcome, in the words of the ICHR, are as follows:

B. B. Chaudhuri: "Agriculture, Rent and Revenue"; Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

S. Bhattacharya: "Financial and Currency Policies"; Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

Surendra Gopal: "Trade (inland and foreign) in the 17th and 18th Centuries"; Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

Nilmoni Mukherjee: "Trade (inland and foreign) in 19th and 20th Centuries"; Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

A. K. Bagchi: "Indian Industries (1860-1939)"; Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

V. B. Singh: "Labour, Prices, and Wages (1914-45)"; Rs. 12,000/-; *Submitted but not traceable.*

In a word, as against six volumes which were to have been published, *not one has been published.* The money having been disbursed, the project just disappeared from the radar-screen !

Only to be succeeded by an even more ambitious project around the same theme, the "Project on Documentation on Economic History." What about this one?, I asked. After all, it had been listed by the ICHR itself as one of the major projects the Council had undertaken. The project was commenced in 1992, said the ICHR. *Seventeen volumes* were to be produced *between 1992 and 1997.* The total cost was to have been Rs. 25 lakhs. As of today, the ICHR disclosed, *no volume* has been published. And a cool Rs. *nineteen and a half lakhs* have already been spent.

What about the "Medieval Sources Project"?, I asked. After some search, the ICHR supplied the following list of the scholars to whom the work was assigned, the subject each was to cover, the money sanctioned, and the result:

Satish Chandra & Co.: Hindi translation of "Early Sources of Akbar's Reign"; *Not completed,* money not indicated.

Irfan Habib: *Akhbarat-e-Aurangzeb*: Rs. 27,000/-; *Not completed.*

Moonis Raza: "Atlas of the Mughal Empire": Rs. 22,400/-; *Not completed.*

Anis Faruqi: *Tashir-ul-Aqwani*: Rs. 9,000/-; *Not completed.*

Satish Chandra: "Documents on Social and Economic History": Rs. 23,000/-; *Not completed.*

P. Saran: *Tarikh-i-Akbari*: Rs. 18,500/-; *Submitted but not traceable.*

– but on that last entry, more in a moment.

What about the much-touted "Translation Project"?, I inquired. It began in April, 1972, the ICHR says, when the National Book Trust proposal for translating the volumes in the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Series on the history and culture of India was received in the ICHR. A committee consisting of the usual eminences – S. Gopal, Tapan Raychaudhuri, Satish Chandra, Romila Thapar – was constituted. This Committee resolved that the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan volumes – which in fact are the very best and most outstanding of works produced in the last fifty years – "are not suitable for translation into Indian languages," and that this proposal should not be pursued any further. The Committee suggested that alternative titles be selected for translation.

And, lo and behold !, the largest number of titles which the eminent historians selected were of the eminences themselves, and of those who advocated their line ! R. S. Sharma, a Chairman of the ICHR: five titles; S. Gopal: three titles; Romila Thapar: three titles; Bipan Chandra: two titles; Irfan Habib: two titles; his father, Mohammed Habib: two titles; Satish Chandra: one title....; Works of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, translated; work of that British controller of the Indian Communists during the 1940's, Rajni Palme Dutt, translated.... But nothing of Lokmanya Tilak, nothing of Sir Jadunath Sarkar, nothing of R.C. Majumdar....

What amount has been spent on this Project?, I inquired, how much royalty was paid to the authors?, I inquired. The

ICHR has incurred an expenditure of Rs. *forty one lakhs and eighty nine thousand*, the Ministry said, and added, "Authors of the books selected for translation were *not* paid royalties."

Having got to know their ways by now, I persisted. Had I used the wrong word?, I inquired. Had they got payment under some head other than "royalties"? The ICHR eventually disclosed that in fact authors were paid, "a lump sum for translation rights": Rs. 1,000 per language per volume if the book was more than 200 pages, and Rs. 500 per language per volume if the book was less than 200 pages. Hence, R. S. Sharma got a total of Rs. 47,000 for his books; Bipan Chandra, Rs. 14,000; Irfan Habib, Rs. 11,000; Romila Thapar, Rs. 12,000....

As is well known, among historians, the National Fellowship of the ICHR is an honour. It also fetches the scholar a substantial amount for continuing his work. The scholar selected for the National Fellowship used to be given Rs. 4,000 a month as Fellowship, plus Rs. 1,000 a month for secretarial assistance. In addition he was provided a Contingency Grant of Rs. 10,000 a year for each of the three years. The amounts are much higher now: the basic Fellowship fetches Rs. 8,500 a month for the scholar. The terms and conditions associated with the Fellowship place the greatest emphasis on the nature of the project the scholar is to pursue during his tenure as a National Fellow. The project is to entail "research of a fundamental or innovative character under the Fellowship," says the official publication of the ICHR. "The project taken up by a National Fellow should be specific, separate and distinct from any project previously undertaken," say the Rules governing the Fellowship. The scholar was to furnish a report every six months, now he is to do so once a year, detailing the progress of the project. "Acceptance of the National Fellowship carries with it a formal acceptance of the Terms and Conditions of the Award," the Rules specify. While

indicating acceptance of the Fellowship, they specify, the scholar must sign a special form indicating that he is accepting the Terms and Conditions attached to the Fellowship.

In a word, there has to be a specific project which is different from anything which has been done before, it has to entail research of a fundamental and innovative nature. The project is to be completed, so much so that bi-annual, now annual reports about the progress towards completing it have to be submitted to the ICHR. And what has been happening?, I asked the ICHR.Which scholars have been awarded National Fellowships by the Council? What projects had they agreed to complete during the Fellowship? What has been the outcome of grants under this scheme?

Between 1985 and 1997, the ICHR states, 22 National Fellowships were awarded. Five of the scholars did not avail of them. Of the remaining *seventeen*, only *two* have submitted "Manuscripts/Reports". Two, the Council is confident, "are about to submit" these. Far from completing the work they had undertaken, the remaining thirteen have not even submitted their Project Reports. Only one scholar is still working under this scheme. Recently the Chairman of the ICHR wrote to the scholars who had availed of the Fellowship requesting information about the work they had done under the scheme. Only two condescended to even reply.

The list of these distinguished scholars and the status of their projects is as follows:

Scholar	*Project*	*Years*	*Status of Project*
G. C. Pande	Not mentioned	May, '85-Apr., '88	Not received
G. S. Talib	Not mentioned	Aug., '85-Feb., '86	Expired after release of second installment

K. A. Nizami	Not mentioned	Jan., '86-Jan., '89	Received
Debala Mitra	History, art and architecture of Bodh Gaya and its images	Nov., '85-Oct., '88	Not received
S. Gopal	Not mentioned	Not availed of	
A. R. Kulkarni	Socio-economic history of Indapur and Maratha Historiography	Mar., '87-Feb., '90	Additional grant sanctioned to complete work; report awaited
P. N. Chopra		Not availed of	
R. S. Sharma	Making of caste and State systems in Madhya Pradesh (AD 400-800)	June, '88-May, '91	`Not received
Satish Chandra	Character of the State and State-system in India, particularly from 16th to end of 18th century	June, '88-June, '91	Not received
B. B. Lal	Project regarding Archaeology of sites relating to Ramayana	Aug., '88-July, '91	Not received
Amlesh Tripathi	Nationalism in India, 1885-1947	Nov., '88-Oct., '91	Not received

M. Athar Ali	Structure of Mughal nobility in Aurangzeb's reign, 1659-1707	Jan., '90-Jan., '93	Report awaited; still availing of grant
J. S. Grewal	Socio-cultural dimensions of Sufi poetry in Punjabi	Apr., '94-Mar., '97	Treated as current
A. Q. Rafiqui		Not availed of	
I. Mahadevan	Early Tamil Paleography	Oct., '92-Sep., '95	Awaited
Ashin Dasgupta	The Indian Maritime Merchant	Sep., '91-Aug., '94	Not received
Vishnu Mitra	Not mentioned	Expired before joining	
Nilmoni Mukherjee		Not availed of	

At the least the list speaks ill of the standard of managing the Council's affairs !

What other projects have been undertaken?, I inquired, and to what result? The ICHR's list:

1. K.K. Dutta: "Old Zamindari Records of Bihar": Rs. 12,000/-; *Submitted two volumes but not traceable.*

2. B. Ramakrishna: "Writings of Veerasalingam": Rs. 12,000/-; *Not submitted.*

3. Bipan Chandra: "Oral History Project": Rs. 75,000/- from ICHR, Rs. 2,00,000/- from ICSSR, and Rs. 4,00,000/- from JNU; *Not completed.*

And so, we are back to our friend.

How to do it !

In its reply to the Rajya Sabha question, the Ministry of Human Resources Development had listed three projects as "major" ones – we have seen what happened to two of them. What about the third one, the one on *Inscriptions*?, I asked. And learnt that it too could match the others in ambition – and in non-achievement too. In addition, the records relating to it give us a glimpse of the entrepreneurial techniques of the eminent.

This particular project was started in 1987. It was to produce a *Dictionary of Socio-Economic and Administrative Terms in Indian Inscriptions*. The *Dictionary* was to be in *nine* volumes – that is a key element in the technology: always propose many volumes ! The project was to be completed in fifteen years – another key element: who knows who will be around 15 years hence ! Twenty lakhs of Rupees were to be taken for the project – a third element: never be niggardly in demanding public funds !

Who were to be in charge? Our good friends. R. S. Sharma, a leading light of the Leftists, a former Chairman of the ICHR, later a leading advisor to the Sunni Waqf Board in its efforts to wrest the Babri Masjid site – he graciously agreed to be the "General Editor". K. M. Shrimali, who was very voluble on behalf of the Camp in the recent controversies, and K. V. Ramesh, with as much grace, agreed to be the "Main Editors". In addition an "Advisory Board"

of another eleven eminences was constituted to oversee the project – this is always a good device: thereby friends can meet at Government expense, and responsibility of the main suspects is always scattered.

Work had scarcely begun, and the scope of the project was enlarged: Arabic, Persian and Urdu inscriptions too would be included. And soon this new part too was enlarged: *farmans* and the like in these languages would also be included, not just inscriptions. This too is always useful: enlarge the project every few months, the new items become the explanation for not having kept to the deadlines specified for the original proposal ! And who would do this part of the project? Why, the most eminent of them all: "Responsibility for compiling the Arabic, Persian and Urdu inscriptions was accepted by Professor Irfan Habib on the request of the ICHR," the records state. How kind !

Everyone was to work in an "honorary capacity" – but in the special sense in which these worthies use the term "honorary" ! Each of the two "Main Editors", the "Editorial Committee" of the project decided in its meeting on 20 September, 1990, would be paid "an honorarium" of Rs. 5,000/- for every four months. The "General Editor" too would be paid an honorarium of Rs. 3,000/- for every four months. A very important rule that – never take money, take honoraria ! The Committee also decided, "Professor Shrimali may be allowed to purchase relevant books in connection with the work of the project if the books are not supplied to him by the ICHR within a reasonable time" – a bit of honorariness which every scholar would lust after !

By 1994 there was a problem: there was little progress to record, though money was getting spent. The then Chairman, Ravinder Kumar [very eminent, the head of the Nehru Museum and Library etc.] convened a meeting of what the record christens the "Consultative Committee". The solution? The Committee decided that a revised proposal be prepared ! Another sure-winner: months can

be put to debating, drafting, redrafting, circulating, finalising this; soon you can be arguing that the revised proposal contains elements which can be attended to only with an enhanced budget....

Better still – prepare not a "revised proposal", prepare a "*draft* revised proposal". And this is what was done. A "draft revised proposal" was prepared, and, the record states, "handed over to the Chairman [Ravinder Kumar] for necessary action and approval."

Sunk without trace ! "It seems, that the draft proposal was not approved," states the review note prepared by the Chairman for the ICHR meeting on 31 August and 1 September, 1998, "and work was not taken up as per revised plan [*sic.*]."

A spat is always useful, specially one involving principle, personal honour, self-respect. And, happily, one erupted. At a meeting of the Research Projects Committee, someone – perhaps Irfan Habib, I am not able to make out from the record – raised an objection: a Committee "in which there was very substantial membership of those who were to be beneficiaries of such a decision" should not have decided about payments to be made to the editors etc., he objected. Arguments ensued, tempers rose. But even as it decided that this shall be a "firm policy for the future", the meeting decided that "each Main Editor, on completion of a particular volume with which he has been associated, be paid an honorarium of Rs. 25,000/-."

It noted that this decision was strictly in accordance with precedent ! "The Committee was prompted to this decision," the minutes record, "in the knowledge that in the 'Towards Freedom' project of the ICHR each volume Editor was to be paid Rs. 25,000/- for his contribution." Unassailable logic: as editors were to get that amount under one project which was not getting anywhere, why not under another project which was not getting anywhere either?

That decided, through an innocuous sentence tagged on

to the end of a paragraph, the minutes slipped in another opportunity: "It may be noted," the minutes noted, "that *two or more* Main Editors may be associated with the completion of each volume of the Dictionary project." From two "Main Editors" for nine volumes, to "two or more Main Editors" for each volume !

"As for the Chief Editor [a promotion that, he had till now been known as the 'General Editor' !]," the minutes recorded, "he should receive a sum of Rs. 30,000/- on the publication of each volume."

R. S. Sharma, as befits his eminence as much as his Leftism, threw a fit – always a useful thing to do a few years into a project: you can then allow yourself to be persuaded, and, when questions are raised later about nothing having been done, you can always claim that you in any case had not wanted any part of the project. "In view of the strictures passed on the 'beneficiaries' of the Dictionary project in the RPC [Research Projects Committee] meeting," he wrote to the Council, "I would not like to continue as Chief Editor. I neither asked for any 'benefice'/ 'benefit' in any meeting or outside nor did I receive any remuneration for the work that I did for the project. As far as I can remember none of the Main Editors asked for any benefit or remuneration in any meeting of the Editorial Committee."

H. R. Deve Gowda, the then Prime Minster, and S. R. Bommai, the then Minister for Human Resources Development, selected the well-known art historian, Professor S. Settar to be the Chairman of the ICHR. In a sense an outsider, he was duly alarmed at the state of such projects. He addressed letters to Sharma, Shrimali and Ramesh in March 1997 inquiring about the work they had done. Months went by, he could not nudge anyone concerned to get on with the work. He accordingly convened a meeting of R. S. Sharma and Irfan Habib on 29 September, 1997. He was asked to contact Shrimali and Ramesh again.

Ramesh now deployed the next weapon: ask for more !

Fools will always throw in good money after bad. He wrote back saying that for him to do the work, the Council should appoint three more scholars to assist him [so helpful was he that he specified the names of the three also !], that the Council should provide him with a computer assistant, and also with rented accommodation ! The Chairman wrote pointing out that already Rs. 45,000/- had been paid to Ramesh, that seven years had passed, and asked how much more time was required. Another year "may be required" if the terms he had proposed were met, Ramesh answered !

In despair, Settar turned to Irfan Habib and Sharma again and "appealed" to them to help out – another tactic: subalterns block the pass; the only way the fellow can hope to proceed is by beseeching, and thereby getting in the debt of the principals ! Sharma recalled that he had already dissociated himself from the project – *vide* the "beneficiaries" spat. In any event, the two met Settar, and agreed to submit – by now you would have guessed – a revised project each !

"The detailed note of the revised project promised by Professor Sharma has not been received so far," the ICHR was informed at its meeting on August 31-September 1, 1998. "Professor Irfan Habib has yet to send his detailed proposal which he promised to send on 10.3.98."

As more and more queries were being made about the project, R. S. Sharma wrote to the Chairman on 7 July, 1998 that "at present I and Shrimali are terribly busy with the editing of *Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. IV, pt. 2. I will consult Shrimali to find out whether he can spare some time for the project this year, though I am not hopeful. A meeting of Ramesh, Shrimali and other members of the editorial board should be helpful for completing the project as soon as possible." Notice the tone: far from being the one who shares a major part of the responsibility for the state of affairs, the person is offering to do a favour, and, against his better judgment, contact Shrimali and see if

something can be done to help the Chairman out !

The result? By now eleven years have passed. Rs. *three lakhs seventy four thousand* have been spent. Nothing but nothing has been published. Thousands of "cards" are said to have been compiled by specially hired "compilers" – these "cards" remain in the personal custody of Shrimali and Ramesh. And the Chairman is under advice that, to get the project going, he has to convene a meeting of the very persons who have brought the project to this state – with the caveat, of course, that the conditions specified by one of them must first be met, and that the other – the TV star – is "terribly busy" on some other project !

And, never forget, if the ICHR takes any step to bring them to account, if it takes any step to hand over the project to anyone else, it is doing so because these eminent historians are secular, and the Council is now set upon saffronising history !

4

A fitting tribute

In his question V. N. Gadgil had asked the Minister to state "whether several hundred manuscripts are either missing from the Council's custody or are totally damaged; if so, what action Government have taken in the matter." In its written reply to the Rajya Sabha the Ministry stated, "The ICHR have informed that a few manuscripts are reportedly either missing or have not been sent to the Press for certain reasons. The Council have intimated that it has initiated action to ascertain whether any manuscript has been lost or appropriated otherwise."

Another rat: see how the case of manuscripts which were "missing" had been clubbed with that of manuscripts which "have not been sent to the Press for certain reasons." And how the case of manuscripts which have been lost had been clubbed with that of manuscripts which have been "appropriated otherwise."

I, therefore, wrote to the Ministry inquiring, "How many manuscripts are covered by the phrase 'a few manuscripts'?" Second, could information please be compiled separately for manuscripts which have been "lost" and those which have "not been sent to the Press for certain reasons?" Third, "Since when has the ICHR 'initiated action to ascertain whether any manuscript has been lost or appropriated otherwise'? What is the current status of this so-called action? In particular, is it a fact that the manuscript submitted

by one of the most distinguished historians of medieval India, Dr. P. Saran has been 'missing'? Is it a fact that an inquiry has been instituted to ascertain whether this very manuscript has been purloined by a staff member of the ICHR itself and printed under his name?"

Late at night on 24 July, 1998, I received, not one but two letters from the Ministry. One stated that details in this regard were being collected. The second letter of the same day stated, "As regards missing manuscripts, the Council has stated that to the best of their knowledge *no manuscript is missing.*" I naturally had to draw the attention of the Ministry to the fact that this was at considerable variance with what they had implied in reply to Gadgil's question.

But much more curious was what they said about the specific manuscript to which I had drawn their attention – namely, that of Dr. Parmatma Saran. The note accompanying one letter said, "The Council has been requested to furnish details in this regard." The note accompanying the second letter of the same day said, "As regards Dr. Parmatma Saran's manuscript entitled *'Tarikh-i-Akbari'* (English translation) *it does not appear to have been received in the Council.* However, an extensive search is on to trace it in the archives."

I pointed out to the Ministry that this assertion was, to say the least, odd. How did it square with the fact that the *Annual Report* of the Council for 1976-1977 on pages 10 and 11 had listed the "English translation of Arif Qandhari's *Tarikh-i-Akbari* by Dr. Parmatma Saran" as being among the volumes which *"have already been completed and received in the Council"*? How did what was being said now – that the manuscript *"does not appear to have been received in the Council"* – square with the fact that the *Annual Report* of the Council for 1977-1978 had on page 9 listed *"Tarikh-i-Akbari of Arif Qandhari:* English translation by Dr. Parmatma Saran" as having *"been received in the Council"*?

The ICHR at last took a step closer to the truth. It wrote,

Yes, the *Annual Reports* confirm that the manuscript prepared by Dr. Saran was indeed received in the Council. By now I had learnt a vital fact. Dr. Saran had died. His son-in-law had written to the Council in 1995. He had pointed out that the *Annual Reports* of the Council had themselves stated that the manuscript had been received by the ICHR, and had added, "As we understand, this project of my father-in-law was to be later published by the ICHR. We are not aware if this has indeed been done by the ICHR although nearly 20 years have elapsed since the translation was completed, *but we have been extremely disturbed to hear stories to the effect that not only has someone else published the translation as his own work, but that this has been done by a member of the staff of the ICHR....*"

The ICHR now acknowledged that an inquiry had been initiated in 1995. The heads of the Publications Section, of the Grants-in-Aid Section, and of the Medieval Unit had been asked what had happened to the manuscript. The Grants-in-Aid Section had confirmed that the manuscript had been received. The Publications Section had said the manuscript had never been forwarded to it. That left the Section which was in a sense responsible for overseeing the project – the Medieval Unit. The Deputy Director in charge of this unit said that the manuscript was not traceable in his unit. Not satisfied with the reply, the then Director had once again urged the Deputy Director, Medieval Unit, "to do his best efforts [*sic.*] to trace out the manuscript."

But the friends, all entangled in those "interlocking webs of mutual complicity," intervened. And the inquiry was killed.

Guess who obtained a Ph.D. from Rajasthan University in 1992 by submitting "an annotated English translation of Arif Qandhari's *Tarikh-i-Akbari.*" Guess who has published the book in his name. The very same Deputy Director in charge of the ICHR's Medieval Unit – Tasneem Ahmad !

The issue having been pursued, the Chairman of the ICHR

launched a massive search for the Saran manuscript. And, guess what! The appropriator had thought that he had executed the perfect crime – that he had destroyed the manuscript of Dr. Saran. But the thorough search initiated by the current Chairman of the ICHR yielded sixty two pages of the manuscript in another file – with corrections in the late Dr. Saran's own hand ! And wonder of wonders *– that manuscript written twenty years earlier was an exact verbatim prelude to the book published by Tasneem Ahmad as his own !*

A new Committee was therefore constituted to compare the two and assess the chances that this miracle could have happened without the Deputy Director of the Council, Tasneem Ahmad having stolen Dr. Saran's work !

How fulsome they have been in commending each other – the patrons and subalterns !

The Foreword to the book first sets out the significance of Arif Qandhari's *Tarikh-i-Akbari:* it confirms what we know from Abul Fazl's *Akbar Nama*, says the eminent historian, it furnishes information we did not have earlier. He then recalls what has been done in regard to Qandhari's history by scholars already: "The *Tarikh-i-Akbari* has been excellently edited and annotated by Muinuddin Nadvi, Azhar Ali Dehlawi and Imtiaz Ali Arshi." And so, the need of the hour: "What it [the *Tarikh-i-Akbari*] now needed was a full-scale English translation." [No mention of the fact that the work had already been translated by Dr. Saran – under the aegis of the ICHR itself !] This pressing need, at last fulfilled, proclaims the eminent historian: "This has been provided by Dr. Tasneem Ahmad in a very competent manner, aiming at faithful accuracy and at a critical assessment of the information here received by comparing it with that offered by other sources."

Not just that. This most eminent of historians writes:

"The publication of Dr. Tasneem Ahmad's translation is a

notable contribution to the National celebration of the 450th Anniversary of Akbar's birth. I feel confident that it would reinforce the interest in Akbar's age widespread among those who have a care for the long process of the creation of a composite culture and a unity that together constitute what is India."

Not just the needs of history, therefore, those of secularism, of unity based on a composite culture too fulfilled ! The dignitary writing the Foreword? Irfan Habib himself – who, among other things has been Chairman of the ICHR twice, and a member five times ! And don't miss the description of India – just the composite culture and unity which it has taken a long process to create ! The unity of course being nothing but a manifestation of, and totally dependent on that composite culture ! So, composite culture it is.

The compliments duly returned: "The first and foremost [*sic.*]," writes Tasneem Ahmad, "I express my profound sense of gratitude, very personal regards and respects to Professor Irfan Habib, who *encouraged and guided me at every stage of the work*. In spite of his very pressing engagements and pre-occupation, he ungrudgingly spared his valuable time to *examine with care every intricate problem, arising out [sic.] during the course of work.*"

The debt to another of these eminences not forgotten either: "My debt to my revered teacher," writes Tasneem Ahmad, "Professor Satish Chandra is incalculable. He took *great pains in reading and correcting the work* and his *considered suggestions* have paid me rich dividend."

"Examining with care every problem arising out during the course of work"? Taking "great pains in reading and correcting the work"? Advancing "considered suggestions" which "pay rich dividend"? – when the entire manuscript has been lifted word for word from the work of Dr. Parmatma Saran!

It isn't just a part of that composite culture that a subaltern

should execute such genuflections towards his patrons. It is plain prudence. By thanking them for "guidance at every stage," for "corrections" and "suggestions", the subaltern ensures that they too are culpable, and, therefore, to protect themselves if for no other reason, they will shield him !

The plagiarised book is appropriately dedicated: "To the memory of my revered *Ustad*," writes Tasneem Ahmad, "Professor S. Nurul Hasan" – a "scholar" famous for his unwritten works, the factotum who initially coordinated the capture of academic institutions by the progressives. How fitting – that when it comes to dedicating something to such a person, the devotee should give as offering a stolen manuscript !

And what do we learn now?

"For some time an allegation has been made on one of the employees of the Council," began a note prepared for the ICHR meeting held on 31 August and September 1, 1998, "that a work entitled *Tarikh-i-Akbari,* translated by Professor Parmatma Saran under the scheme of the ICHR, was appropriated by the Deputy Director of a Medieval Unit [of the ICHR itself]." Because of the persistence of this allegation, and because of questions raised by members of Parliament, it goes on to say, the Chairman constituted a Fact-Finding Committee on 8 August, 1998 to get to the bottom of the matter.

The Committee consisted of Professor K. S. Lal, an authority on medieval India, Professor Harbans Mukhia of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Dr. T. R. Sareen, former Director of the ICHR. It was asked to assess, *inter alia,* whether Dr. Parmatma Saran's manuscript had been received in the Council [you will recall that in one of their letters to me the Ministry of Human Resources Development had said that it did not seem that the manuscript had ever been received], and to ascertain whether the manuscript had been "in any form plagiarised by any body, within or outside the Council."

The manuscript of 62 pages which had been recovered in the almirahs of the ICHR was turned over to the Committee. Here are the Committee's findings on the questions:

"(1) On the strength of the published *Annual Report* of the ICHR for the year 1976-77 (p. 11), it is obvious that the translation of *Tarikh-i-Akbari* into English done by Professor Parmatma Saran was received in the Council. This is also confirmed by the report submitted by the Grants-in-Aid Unit of the Council dated 24.8.1995 when a preliminary enquiry was constituted to locate the manuscript. The fact[s] [are] that full payment of honorarium was made to the scholar (which in normal case is only done after the receipt of the completed manuscript), and the second project was granted to Professor P. Saran only after completion of the first project. This related to the translation of *Mirat-ul-Istlab,* which was assigned to Professor P. Saran in February, 1978. This also indirectly confirms the receipt of the earlier manuscript on *Tarikh-i-Akbari.* With this evidence, the Committee is led to believe that there is no reason to doubt the receipt of the manuscript *Tarikh-i-Akbari* by the Council.

(2) The Committee was provided with sixty odd pages of type-script of the translation of *Tarikh-i-Akbari* done by Professor P. Saran. These pages were recovered from the file dealing with the translation assigned to Professor P. Saran. These pages were compared with that published by one of the members of the ICHR, Shri Tasneem Ahmad, and the Committee found overwhelming similarity between Professor P. Saran's translation and Shri Ahmad's book. The Committee felt that the similarity could not be accidental and the element of plagiarism cannot be ruled out."

How befitting: as tribute to the 450th anniversary of Akbar, to that "composite culture and unity that together constitute India," – a plagiarised book !

And the finale: in his office at the ICHR Tasneem Ahmad has kept on display a photograph – it shows him presenting the book to the then President of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma ! The touch of a well-practised hand !

When cornered, cry "Petty," "Personal," "Uncivilised"

By late June-early July 1998 the controversy which had begun by the "rational" versus "national" fabrication planted by these eminent historians, had reached quite a pitch. Newspaper after newspaper had taken up the matter. The matter had also come up in Parliament. Manoj Raghuvanshi, who runs the popular programme *Aap ki Adalat, Aap ka Faisla*, on ZEE TV invited one of these eminences, K. M. Shrimali, and me to discuss the matter.

With much righteousness Shrimali remarked that he was full of apprehensions because the sorts of persons who were now taking over the ICHR were persons who had been distorting history, and suppressing facts. "For example?," asked Manoj Raghuvanshi.

Beef was eaten in ancient India, said Shrimali, and these people suppress this fact.

I have never understood this charge. Assume that beef was eaten 5,000 years ago, why should anyone want to suppress the fact? And how would the fact that beef was eaten then dilute the fact that today the Hindus hold the cow in reverence? Several tribes the world over were cannibals. Today they are not. Does that mean that their desisting from eating each other is less of a fact?

Customs change, beliefs change, rituals change. For public policy the current belief is the one which has to be taken

into account. The original Qibla towards which the Prophet asked his followers to bow was Jerusalem, not the Kaba at Mecca. Does that mean that the reverence which Muslims now have for the Kaba is a put-on? Or consider the matter the other way round: almost every single ritual connected with the *haj* is a carry-over from the pre-Islamic pagan period; does this fact make the rituals less significant? The point for public policy is that for thousands of years now Hindus have revered the cow; that in the passages asking Muslims to sacrifice animals to His glory, Allah in the Quran does not say they should sacrifice cows; that the most feverish efforts of the *ulema* in India to find some *hadis* in which the Prophet may have ordered Muslims to sacrifice cows have failed to yield anything; that, therefore, there is not the slightest difficulty in construing the beliefs of the two communities harmoniously: Muslims may sacrifice animals other than the cow and thereby heed what they regard as the command of Allah. The problem arises because "Muslim divines" like Maulana Ahmad Riza Khan, Ali Mian etc. insist that, precisely because Hindus revere the cow, it is the religious duty of Muslims to butcher the cow in India. But to revert to the TV programme.

And what is the evidence for that?, asked Raghuvanshi.

There are hundreds of writings to that effect, Shrimali said loftily.

In which Veda, in which text, which verse in which text?, asked Raghuvanshi.

I have not brought the books with me, said Shrimali, but the evidence is all over.

But name one text, name one verse, Raghuvanshi persisted.

Shrimali could not or did not name a single text, to say nothing of any verse or passage from it.

Someone from the audience interjected. Here are the four Vedas, he said, handing over the books, read us a single passage from any of them which supports what you

are saying. Raghuvanshi took the books from the person and took them over to Shrimali. Shrimali refused to look at them. Indeed, he recoiled.

Raghuvanshi then went to his table and began reading out passage after passage from the Vedas in which there were strongest possible commands to *not* eat beef.

At my request he asked Shrimali to read the verses himself.

Shrimali refused to do that. Instead, he became even more aggressive. So what if I cannot recall a text or recite a verse?, he said. But you are an expert on Ancient India, Raghuvanshi said. What has my not being able to recall a verse have to do with my being an expert?, Shrimali answered.

Even if you produce scores of verses against eating beef, that will not prove that beef was not eaten, Shrimali now maintained. But when the Vedas lay down that the cow is *not* to be killed, how do you keep saying that there was no prohibition against eating beef?, Raghuvanshi asked. That there was a prohibition does not mean that it was not eaten – that seemed to be Shrimali's new tack ! Surely, the point was about the norm, about what was expected, enjoined: true, that our Penal Code prohibits murder does not mean that no murders take place; but the fact that some persons still murder does not mean that murders are approved as an industry !

I did not say the Vedas, he said, I said "Vedic literature."

All right. Name a single book from "Vedic literature" which supports your position. He did not do so.

The exchange went on – with Raghuvanshi and the audience asking for a single passage, for the name of a single book, and Shrimali refusing – failing is the correct word – to furnish either.

The programme was broadcast in the third week of July. Clearly Shrimali had come out in poor light. He therefore started writing critiques of the programme in newspapers – or rather that he started writing the same critique in

different newspapers.[1]

"Blatant editing of the programme," he charged. "Mr. Raghuvanshi combined the role of both the prosecutor and the judge," he wrote.

"I am less bothered about highly personalised and somewhat uncivilised attack on me in the context of the question on beef eating," he said. Personalised attack? Uncivilised attack? Everyone was polite. All that the audience asked for, the only thing I asked for in the single interjection I made, the only thing that Raghuvanshi asked for a dozen times, was that Shrimali name a single book, a single passage in that single book which would substantiate what he was saying. How do those requests become a "highly personalised attack"? How does asking for substantiation become an "uncivilised attack"?

The substance apart, notice the umbrage that these people take. They traduce, they abuse, they denounce, they spit and run, but if you so much as ask them to substantiate what they are saying, they are deeply offended. A highly personalised attack, they scream. An uncivilised attack, they shriek.

That he could not cite the passage or name the book, Shrimali now made out, had no bearing on the point he was making. Writing in *The Hindu* he said:

> "It is sought to be projected that there is no case for beef eating in ancient India just because I could not recite any *shloka* (verse). I was reminded of a telling passage in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* where brahmans reciting mantras are compared with many dogs who play amongst themselves by forming a circle by holding one another's tails. I am sure, if I had recited that passage, it would not have reached the public."

In a word: substantiating an assertion adds nothing. For,

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[1] The following statements of Shrimali are taken from *The Hindu*, 10 September 1998.

the assertion, as it is being made by so eminent an authority, is by that reason itself a fact ! In any case, if the authority had substantiated the fact, the substantiation would have been deleted because those who were asking him to substantiate his assertion were biased and partisan !

And, of course, the disdain: in any case, what these blockheads were asking me to do was beneath an authority like me, for I am The Historian ! These fools do not even have the capability of understanding the nuances of my argument ! To put the point in Shrimali's words:

> "The entire segment failed to grapple with the main question of the methodology of historical enquiry. My focus on how a historian is expected to explain contradictory evidences on any historical problem has been deliberately eliminated. *Mantrocharana* (recitation of a *mantra*) is not history writing. Neither the host, nor perhaps anyone in the monolithic audience, and not even Mr. Shourie had the capability of understanding such nuances of historical writing."

The discussion had moved on to Aurangzeb. Was Aurangzeb a religious bigot or not?, Raghuvanshi had asked. Shrimali would not give a clear answer even though Raghuvanshi kept repeating the question. Shrimali recalled the fact we shall soon encounter at some length – that Aurangzeb's Court had many Hindu nobles ! But so were there many Indians among the persons the British honoured with titles ! And both for the same reason. How does the fact wipe away the destruction of temples, for instance, by Aurangzeb?

When Manoj asked me the same question, I remarked that at least Aurangzeb had entertained no doubt about the fact that his primary impulse was the religious one. And that he faithfully implemented an essential element of his religion, Islam, that is to destroy the places of worship of other religions.

When Raghuvanshi asked me for evidence on that point,

I read out some of the passages from the *Akhbarat* of the Court of Aurangzeb himself. The programme broadcast one or two of these passages.

Shrimali's comment on the exchange?

> "More glaring partisanship displayed by the host is evident in the complete blacking out of my detailed exposition of the other side of alleged religious bigotry of Aurangzeb. On this issue too, Manoj has not only deliberately omitted factual information given by me on the basis of contemporary sources but also my emphasis on the role of a historian in writing about such issues. [All this about those Hindu nobles.] In contrast, Shourie's readings of long passages from questionable sources was retained."

"Questionable sources?" But the passages were from the contemporary bulletins of the Court of the very person who was under discussion. They were from histories and accounts written at that very time, in many cases written on the very day the news reached the Emperor and his Court.

But that is standard technique – the reader of his comment will not be able to go back to the programme and verify the fact for himself. It is unlikely that he would have sufficient background to be able to assess the veracity of a source. So, when an eminent historian says that the sources were "questionable", they must have been questionable !

The staff of the ICHR brings me yet another example of the way these eminent historians respond when cornered. At the prompting of these very persons, the World Archaeology Conference decided that there would be special sessions on the destruction of the Mosque at Ayodhya during the WAC Inter-Congress in Croatia on the Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Properties.

One of these eminent historians approached the organisers and offered to do a paper on the question. On 3 November 1997 the person incharge in the U.K. wrote to the historian that they were pleased to accept his offer, that

he should send the full text of his paper by 31 January so that it could be included alongwith the other papers which were to be distributed to the participants. He also wrote to the historian that if the latter needed help with the cost of his airfare he should contact "X" at University "Y" and the person would see what money was available for the purpose.

Our historian sent the paper. On 9 February 1998 he applied to the ICHR for financial assistance to cover the airfare to and from the venue of the session, the registration fee of $ 300, as well as "such incidental daily expenses as are permissible under the rules."

Given the clout of such persons, the request was cleared within three days and he was sanctioned "a partial travel grant of Rs. 20,000/-." He was duly informed on 13 February 1998 of this decision. In the letter informing him of the decision of the Council, he was requested to ensure that the funds would be utilised after duly adjusting the funds he might receive from other sources, including "self-funding".

Within a few days the Council learnt that, in fact, the World Archaeology Congress was liable to meet expenses – including airfare – of the participants who had been asked to present papers.

On 23 February 1998 the eminent historian wrote again to the ICHR saying, "There is a possibility that I may be granted some funds either by the University of Delhi or the hosts to pay the airfare. I hope that in such a situation the Council will have no objection to transfer the sanctioned amount to meet other expenses, if necessary."

No correspondence transpired thereafter. The historian was given Rs. 18,000/- as advance.

On 22 April 1998 the organisers sent a fax to our eminence, informing him that they had sent the airticket and that it could be picked up at the Scandinavian Airlines desk at the New Delhi Airport. Did he have a place to stay in London, or would he want them to organise something?, they inquired.

The Conference came and went. Our friend returned to Delhi. As others had also attended the Conference, by now the Council knew exactly what expenses had been met in the case of participants by the organisers. The atmosphere too had changed: a new Government was in place; the Council itself had been reconstituted – the old eminences had been replaced.

It was only on 23 July 1998 – eight months after he originally received the offer from the organisers about the airfare – that this distinguished historian informed the Council that "Since the amount sanctioned was very inadequate, I had to look for other sources to meet my travel expenses. I was able to get full travel grant (both ways) from the hosts. In view of this, I shall be grateful if the amount sanctioned by the Council is transferred to meet my daily expenses."

There was much discussion, and many notings on the file within the ICHR. The officers concerned pointed out that the amount had been sanctioned only for travel, that under the rules the amount could not be used for any purpose other than the purpose for which the sanction had been granted by the Research Projects Committee etc. There is a delicate point, the Chairman recorded on the file, in that the Council may not have given a *per diem* allowance to other scholars. In any case, it was decided, "let the scholar furnish an account of the expenses he had incurred and also intimate the grants which he had received from other sources."

Accordingly, the officer concerned wrote to our distinguished eminence on 14 August 1998, requesting him to furnish details on the two points.

Below my dignity !, Petty !, screamed our eminence. The University Grants Commission "pays certain allowance for such expenses at an approved rate," wrote the historian to the Council, "and one is not expected to submit vouchers for petty expenses. Asking for such details is, therefore,

uncalled for. I find it quite petty."

"I am, therefore, withdrawing my request and refunding the amount which had been given to me as advance," he wrote.

Should I give the name of the historian?

But wouldn't that also be petty? Would that also not be "a personal attack," "an uncivilised attack"?

In any case, the operational rules are clear.

Remember your dignity is so high that you are not to be bound by rules that apply to mere mortals.

Second rule: Cornered, take offence. Recall how in the case of the *Inscriptions* project, R. S. Sharma had slipped out of the net by taking umbrage: as the term "beneficiaries" has been used to describe the editors, I shall have nothing to do with the project ! The same device to deflect accountants: "....uncalled for. I find it quite petty" !

The third rule is an even more potent weapon, and, therefore, as we shall see, even more frequently used.

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"....after selling himself in the flesh market"

"This is an old charge which keeps surfacing now and then," wrote one of these historians, K. N. Panikkar in *The Asian Age*[1] in response to an article in which I had nailed the "rational" vs. "national" forgery they had circulated. He said that *The Times of India* too had put out a front-page story about the *Towards Freedom Project* the previous year. And the historians had clarified the facts through a public statement....

We have seen more of the facts since. But what he said – "This is an old charge...." – is something to bear in mind – there is never a right time to ask a question about them. If events are still fresh, their response always is: "But where are the facts?" If you happen to have enumerated and substantiated the twenty facts about which evidence is in, their response is: "But he has not taken into account item 21; this selective focus on just a handful of facts shows that he is working to a purpose." When sufficient time has elapsed, and you have garnered and presented evidence about *all* the facts, their response is: "But this is an old charge. That he is raking it up now shows how the forces of reaction are panic-stricken at the growing consolidation of forces of secularism and democracy."

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[1] *The Asian Age*, 7 July, 1998, p. 13.

And there is never a right person to question them either. If the critic happens to have been one of them at some time in the past, and speaks from inside knowledge, they denounce him: "His writing itself shows that he has crossed the barricade." If he has not, they shout: "A habitual Left-baiter, notorious for having been at the World Bank, a self-confessed apologist for the forces of reaction...."

And each time they set forth a spate of angry words ! "If he believes, as he apparently does, that the fame of historians like S. Gopal, R. S. Sharma, Romila Thapar and Irfan Habib who are held in high academic esteem, both nationally and internationally, are [*sic.*] based on cheap manipulation," wrote Panikkar, "there must be something congenitally wrong with his mind. Otherwise it is possible that he is reflecting his own personal experience as to how a 'fellow' like him who writes communal mythology has come to be regarded a distinguished journalist."

"Finally, about hymen and virginity about which Shourie, as a good Hindu, is rightly concerned," Panikkar continued. "In the public eye his hymen has not remained intact, not because where he writes or to whom he gives interviews and articles, only because what he writes. Needless to say that the RSS publications carry his interviews and articles only because they are rabidly communal. He cannot hope to remain a virgin after selling himself in the flesh market. Being a BJP member of Parliament and an ideologue of Hindu communalism, Shourie should get his hymen tested, if he is still under misconception about his virginity."

That is scholarly response. Indeed, in their circles it passes for "devastating refutation" ! But one must go the extra mile: proclaim your belief in double-standards – yes, I do what he does, but I do so because I believe in *The Cause* !

"As for me, unlike him, I do not hunt with the hound and run with the hare," Panikkar continued, though it wasn't clear what the colloquism was in aid of. "I contribute signed articles to the publications of the Communist Party, because

I believe in the ideals it stands for – democracy, secularism and socialism. By doing so, if my hymen is broken, I do not lament it, as Shourie does."

All this as an answer to the facts about the working of the ICHR to which I had drawn attention !

Of course, there was one devastating fact which Panikkar reserved for the end. "Incidentally, for the sake of record," he concluded in a sort of crescendo to his peroration, "the name of 'this man' whom Shourie describes as a 'ring leader' is not K. N. Panicker, but K. N. Panikkar. If not his facts, he should at least get the spelling right."

It just so happened that as his name had been spelled differently in the newspapers, I had taken the spelling from the 22 October, 1994 issue of *The Gazette of India* which had announced his appointment to the ICHR !

An old charge.... Strong words.... Guilt-by-association.... In a word, shout, scream, throw a label, paste a motive – and thereby frighten.

How familiar.

"The criticism that Communists decide their policy not in the interests of their own country but in the interests of the Soviet Union is neither new nor original," thundered the Communist Party of India at Gandhiji and the Congress when it was confronted with evidence of having betrayed the National Movement during the Quit India struggle, and teamed up with the British. "It has been an old, very old gibe of the reactionary parties and their scribes the world over. It was the main theme the British Prosecutor played up against us in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. If 17 years later you make the same suggestion against us, we cannot but ask you – Is this worthy of you?"[2]

And always, there is the decisive proof – of having been

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[2] *Communist Reply to the Congress Working Party Charges,* by the General Secretary of the Party, P. C. Joshi, Communist Party of India, Calcutta, March, 1946, abridged version, pp. 3-4.

vindicated by History ! "All our brother parties had to live down this slander through their work among their own people," the Communist Party continued. "And if in the world of today there is any single political force which is growing it is the Communist movement. If any banner has lost ground in every country, it is the bankrupt banner of blind anti-communism."

Towards the end of 1983, Mr. V. M. Tarkunde invited me to deliver the M. N. Roy Memorial Lecture for 1984. The lecture was held on the same day in 1984 as it is every year – the birth anniversary of M. N. Roy. I documented the treacherous role the Communists had played during the 1942 Movement. Pritish Nandy, then Editor of *The Illustrated Weekly*, carried the text in a series. The text contained documents from Indian and British Archives – of secret liaisons of the Communist functionaries with British rulers, of the reports they furnished detailing the service they were rendering to the British, the requests they were making and the concessions they were being given....

E.M.S. Namboodiripad rushed to Bombay. Shourie is speaking for the forces of reaction, he thundered at a specially-convened press conference. These forces have panicked at the growing unity of secular and democratic forces.... They are unnerved that they will get a sound drubbing at the elections which are round the corner....

No elections were round any corner. Mr. Tarkunde had given his invitation five months earlier. The Communists' role in the Quit India Movement had not been the topic I had thought of in the first instance. I had thought that I would speak on "Ideology as Blinkers," and that I would illustrate my argument with four examples. By the time of the lecture only one example was ready – that relating to the Communists during the 1942 Movement. And that is how I got to speak on the topic when I did. But "conspiracy", "unnerved", "elections round the corner".... it was !

The Communist Party of India published a series of

pamphlets – *Arun Shourie's Slanders Rebutted: History has vindicated the Communists....*[3]

"This is not the first time that the Quit India movement has been forked out to slander and attack the communist movement in our country," began the Foreword by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, C. Rajeshwara Rao. "Whenever the ruling circles and reactionary vested interests are in a tight corner or the communist movement is making headway, they would dig up old fables to whip up anti-Communist prejudices. The pet theme is the so-called 'betrayal' of the freedom struggle in 1942 by the united Communist Party of India. Such things have happened a number of times in the past, even as late as 1975, during the days of Emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi" – that last bit was truly audacious ! For it was the General Secretary's very own Communist Party which had *supported* Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency !

"Now the extreme reaction is worried because of the forging of left unity through the united struggles of the toiling people and also its gathering round of democratic allies," the General Secretary pronounced. "Hence this resurrection of the ghost of 1942 once again by Mr. Arun Shourie in order to isolate the communist movement by fanning anti-communism."

"One would have ignored these attacks since we know very well that this is not the first time that such attacks have been leveled against us," the publication declared. "Arun Shourie, howsoever his journalistic talent may be, stands no comparison to such eminent personalities who have attacked us in the past. The eminent barrister, Langford

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[3] The following illustrative passages are taken from *Arun Shourie's Slanders Rebutted, History has vindicated the Communists,* Communist Party of India, New Delhi, June 1984, and *1942 August Struggle and the Communist Party of India,* Communist Party of India, New Delhi, June 1984.

James, of Meerut Conspiracy Case called us anti-God, anti-family, anti-decent everything with no sense of humour. History vindicated us. The Communist Party of India grew from strength to strength since those days of 1929. Today the Communist Movement is a strength to reckon with." What all this had to do with the facts which I had set out, what I had to do with that barrister of 1929 was and remains a mystery. But "devastating refutation" it was ! And remember the line, "One would have ignored these attacks...." – it too is a standard one. The facts which have been brought to light, even more so those who have brought the facts to light are always beneath their dignity to answer. Recall Panikkar's lofty self-abnegation: "The alternative of suing for defamation the likes of Shourie is below one's dignity...."[4]

Apart from everything else, one reason this is so is that the dunce is not going to be able to comprehend the reality in any case. "It will be a waste of effort and also good space to refute this nonsense which betrays Shourie's utter ignorance of history and world events," the Communist Party publication continued – recall Shrimali on his nuances being beyond the comprehension of persons like me! "We do not want to go into his vapid nonsensical utterances in the last installment. They are tarred with the same rotten anti-Communist stuff with the hackneyed claim that communists are but the agents of Moscow (or rather of the Soviet Union) and as such they are to be treated with contempt. [On the contrary, my argument had been that precisely for this reason they ought to be treated with wariness, that their potential for harming the country, for poisoning discourse must not be ignored !] Even a cursory reading of the names of the Communist Party members who have found their way from other streams of the national movement, either of the national revolutionary or of the

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[4]*The Asian Age,* 7 July, 1998, p.13

orthodox Gandhian type [And what about those who saw through the Communist Party, including several of the topmost 'functionaries of the Party, and left it?] and the whole host of intellectuals who have adored [*sic.*] the ranks of the Communist Party, and the large mass of workers and peasants who have acquired a new stature in their life by joining and working for the Communist Party would belie Arun Shourie's vile slanders." Suppose for a moment that all the intellectuals of India had fallen to "adoring" the ranks of the Communist Party, that every worker and peasant had become a devotee of the Party, how would that alter the assistance the Party had rendered to the British?

And the "this-is-an-old-charge" defence again: "These slanders themselves are not of Arun Shourie's original imagination either; they are products of a diseased and jaundiced view of the state of affairs which cannot bear the thought of the ordinary worker and peasant, of the ordinary man taking part and having a say in the political life of the country...."

Mockery, derision, scorn, the charge of conspiracy, of secret funds being pumped in by un-named forces, the charge that the critic is privilege-personified and therefore cannot stand the fact that, because of the struggles put up by the Left, the masses are coming into their own – an avalanche to scare everyone from doing what this fellow has done. "The argument would be similar to say, 'When did you last stop beating your wife?' This pearl of wisdom which Shourie seems to be bestowing cannot just be called a fool's paradise in which he may be lurking. It is a dangerous game to sow dissensions in the minds of the young political workers. And there are many other interests in the country who are financing it as is evident from various translations and other media coverage that have gone with it."

But hope, confidence too – lest the rank and file lose heart: "But truth is truth and must stand out, even when Shourie indulges in making a lot of '*shor*' (noise), but with

a purpose no doubt."

The great names who saw the light and acknowledged that the Communists are the ones who had been right....: "They all did this out of a process of understanding of national events in the context of international developments which is beyond the mental horizon of Arun Shourie or similar other anti-Communist scribes who have slandered us in the past...." Two key points in that – the ones who criticise them are deficient in understanding, and they are congenitally anti-Communist.

"It is difficult for Arun Shourie to realise this, devoid as he is of any political perspective" – the person in question can be said to have "political perspective" only when and if he reaches the same conclusions as the Communists !

As the man lacks elementary political understanding, it is always pointless to check up the facts which such a person has adduced: I had published extensive extracts from a 120-page report which the Communist Party had submitted to the British narrating the assistance its members were rendering by sabotaging the Quit India Movement. "The so-called 120-page document," the publication scoffed, "unfortunately I thought it a waste of time to count whether it was actually 120-pages as Shourie seems to have done."

Hence, the confidence in the future: "We are aware that the four articles by Arun Shourie both in English and other languages are designed particularly to create a rift between the left and the other democratic forces. We have every confidence that this will fail and our healthy national movement will work steadily towards the goal of bringing about the social transformation through the path of peace, consolidation of national freedom, and socialism."

Arun Shourie's series, began another publication which the Communist Party put out, "is a long chain of distortions, canards and slander against the Communist Party of India, the international communist movement and the Soviet Union...." "From 1944 onward (and even earlier) paid pen-

pushers and agents of imperialism and the bourgeoisie have repeatedly run slander campaigns against the CPI and the USSR...." Hansraj Vohra.... Langford James, the barrister again...., "the notorious Minoo Masani and later on his worthy 'disciple' Sitaram Goel"....

"Naturally enough questions are being asked by people all over India: why has Shourie started this foul campaign *now*?...." That is always a useful question to ask: when you can't answer a person on facts, ask: "But why *now*?" India carries out its first nuclear explosion on 18 May, 1974 at Pokhran. And what does the redoubtable representative of the Communists ask in the Lok Sabha?

> "We have been told that we have [had] the capability for a long time, we could have set off this blast much earlier, if we wanted to. Well, if we could have set it off much earlier, we could have set it off much later also. My question is about the timing of it. There must be some reason behind the timing of this, this particular timing of 18th May. I am not clear about it."[5]

Redouble authority by quoting each other ! That is twice-blessed: it doubles the weight of your assertion, and, as the comrade is being cited as an authority, it doubles his weight for the future ! And so the publication fortifies the question it has posed – the hardy perennial, "But why *now*?" – by citing what E. M. S. Namboodiripad has asked ! "Reputed Communist leader and General Secretary of the CPI(M) E. M. S. Namboodiripad," it says, "has queried: 'Why should Arun Shourie have taken up the shop-soiled wares of Communist Betrayal in 1942, 40 years after the Quit India struggle started?'" And the answer too is fortified by citing E. M. S. once again: "The seasoned anti-Communist Minoo Masani promptly jumped into the fray, in defence

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[5]*Lok Sabha Debates*, August 8, 1974, Column 223.

of Shourie.... E. M. S. sharply retorts: 'What Mr. Shourie himself and Mr. Masani are afraid of is thus the coming together of opposition parties not opposed to the Communists, but cooperating with them. This is exactly what I suspected in my Bombay press conference.'...." "Thus the cat is out of the bag," the publication proclaimed in triumph taking E. M. S.' assertion as proof . "Large segments of the non-Communist non-left opposition parties have repeatedly joined hands with the Communist-led left opposition, both against the authoritarian forces led by Indira Congress as well as against right-wing communal and divisive forces like the BJP and others. This has alarmed both Indira Gandhi and her entourage, as well as the BJP, RSS and their allies. Shourie and Masani have come out as their spokesmen and in their desperate efforts to drive a wedge between the Communists and the non-Communist opposition parties. In this foul effort, what better weapon can they take up than the shop-soiled ware of anti-Communist, anti-Soviet canard?" Thus, congenitally anti-Communist, vile motives, desperation of the critic – all there !

Next, a repeat of denunciation-by-association: "Let us now have a brief look at the 'noble' anti-Communist predecessors of Arun Shourie !," the publication proceeds. Hansraj Vohra.... Minoo Masani.... And now comes Arun Shourie who is supposed to be a talented journalist but who has been exposed as a communalist.... And who has published his articles? *The Illustrated Weekly of India* which has also published an article [among the hundreds it would have published in the period !] "The RSS will stay" by an RSS member. And so the truth manifest: "The communists must go and the RSS must stay – the '*Weekly*'-Shourie-Masani tie-up is now crystal clear ! This is the basic reason why Shourie has picked up from the dustbin of history the discarded weapon of anti-communism !"

Forty pages of such sterling refutations in one publication,

twenty-three pages in another. All leading to the conclusion – at once triumphal and defiant, and comic:

> "The CPI is a party of heroes and martyrs of freedom struggle as well as of class battles. The Shouries and Masanis can wear the shop-soiled dirty shirt of anti-communism as long as they like, but their place is in the dung-heap of history ! The combined imperialist armies tried to destroy the young Soviet State. They failed. Hitler tried it too and was destroyed in turn. Today the Reagans and Thatchers are again trying to play the same dirty game. They too will meet the fate of Hitler and Mussolini ! So also will their paid henchmen, who spatter mud at the communists ! Like old man Galileo facing the inquisition and like our own Dimitrov, facing the butcher Goering, we Indian communists also hurl defiance at the face of all our reactionary detractors and persecutors and with rock-like conviction, resolutely declare: Nonetheless, the Earth goes forward, and all roads lead to Communism !"

Amen !

Twin lessons in that. To roll back their untruth, we must immunise ourselves against their verbal terrorism. And among the easy prophylactics is to cut out and store their vituperation – in less than no time it mutates into the ridiculous. The press conferences and pamphlets were hurled at me in 1984. In 1986 in his *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, E.M.S. Namboodiripad acknowledged that communists had collaborated with the British during the "Quit India" Movement.[6] In 1984, as we have just seen, the Communists were proclaiming, "Nonetheless, the Earth goes forward, and all roads lead to Communism." In 1989 the Berlin Wall was pulled down....

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[6]Social Scientist Press, Trivandrum, 1986. Even at this stage Namboodiripad proffered convoluted explanations for the collaboration: c.f., my '*The Only Fatherland*', ASA, 1991, pp. 3–11. Soon he was saying it had been a mistake!

Their Line

A circular

Manoj Raghuvanshi had invited K. M. Shrimali, one of this group of eminences, and me to discuss on ZEE Television's *Aap ki Adalat, Aap ka Faisala* the charge that history was being rewritten in communal colours. Raghuvanshi read out what *Outlook* had reported – that the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education had issued instructions in 1989 that "Muslim rule should never attract any criticism. Destruction of temples by Muslim rulers and invaders should not be mentioned."

Raghuvanshi asked Shrimali, whether this did not amount to distortion? True, that was a painful period of our history, Raghuvanshi said, but should it be erased from our history books? Would that be objective history, rational history? Shrimali's response was the well-practised script: firstly, he did not know that such an instruction had ever been issued; if it had been issued, he said, he was against it; but one must see what the context was in which the instruction had been issued....

Concerned teachers in West Bengal have been so kind as to send me the Circular relating to textbooks for Class IX. Dated 28 April, 1989, it is issued by the West Bengal Secondary Board. It is in Bengali, and carries the number "Syl/89/1".

"All the West Bengal Government recognised secondary school Headmasters are being informed," it begins, "that

in History textbooks recommended by this Board for Class IX the following amendments to the chapter on the medieval period have been decided after due discussions and review by experts."

"The authors and publishers of Class IX History textbooks," it continues, "are being requested to incorporate the amendments if books published by them have these *aushuddho* [impurities, errors] in all subsequent editions, and paste a corrigendum in books which have already been published. A copy of the book with the corrigendum should be deposited with the Syllabus Office (74, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Calcutta – 16)." Signed, "....Chattopadhyaya, Secretary."

The accompanying pages contain two columns: *aushuddho* – impurity, or error – and *shuddho*. One has just to glance through the changes to see the objective the progressives are trying to achieve through their "objective", "rational" approach to the writing of history. Here are some of the changes.

Book: *Bharat Katha*, prepared by the Burdwan Education Society, Teachers Enterprise, published by Sukhomoy Das:

Page 140: Aushuddho – "In Sindhudesh the Arabs did not describe Hindus as *Kafir*. They had banned cow-slaughter." *Shuddho* – "Delete, 'They had banned cow-slaughter'."

Page 141: Aushuddho – "Fourthly, using force to destroy Hindu temples was also an expression of aggression. Fifthly, forcibly marrying Hindu women and converting them to Islam before marriage was another way to propagate the fundamentalism of the *ulema*." *Shuddho:* though the *ashuddho* column reproduces the sentences only from "Fourthly....," the Board directs that the entire matter from "Secondly.... to *ulema*" be deleted.

Page 141: Aushuddho – "The logical, philosophical, materialist Mutazilla disappeared. On the one hand, the fundamentalist thinking based on the Quran and the *hadis*...." *Shuddho* – "Delete, 'On the one hand, the fundamentalist thinking based on the Quran and the *hadis*'...."

Book: *Bharatvarsher Itihash*, by Dr. Narendranath Bhattacharya, published by Chakravarty and Son:

Page 89: Aushuddho – "Sultan Mahmud used force for widespread murder, loot, destruction and conversion." *Shuddho* – "There was widespread loot and destruction by Mahmud." That is, no reference to killing, no reference to forcible conversions.

Page 89: Aushuddho – "He looted valuables worth 2 crore dirham from the Somnath temple and used the Shivling as a step leading up to the *masjid* in Ghazni." *Shuddho* – "Delete 'and used the Shivling as a step leading up to the *masjid* in Ghazni.'"

Page 112: Aushuddho – "Hindu-Muslim relations of the medieval ages constitute a very sensitive issue. The non-believers had to embrace Islam or death." *Shuddho* – All matter on pages 112-13 to be deleted.

Page 113: Aushuddho – "According to Islamic law non-Muslims will have to choose between death and Islam. Only the Hanafis allow non-Muslims to pay *jaziya* in exchange for their lives." *Shuddho* – Rewrite this as follows: "By paying *jaziya* to Alauddin Khalji, Hindus could lead normal lives." Moreover, all the subsequent sentences "Qazi....", "Taimur's arrival in India...." to be deleted.

Page 113: Aushuddho – "Mahmud was a believer in the rule of Islam whose core was 'Either Islam or death'." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Book: *Bharuter Itihash*, by Shobhankar Chattopadhyaya, published by Narmada Publishers:

Page 181: Aushuddho – "To prevent Hindu women from being seen by Muslims, they were directed to remain indoors." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Book: *Itihasher Kahini*, by Nalini Bhushan Dasgupta, published by B. B. Kumar:

Page 132: Aushuddho – "According to Todd [the famous

chronicler of Rajasthan annals] the purpose behind Alauddin's Chittor expedition was to secure Rana Rattan Singh's beautiful wife, Padmini." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Page 154: Aushuddho – "As dictated by Islam, there were three options for non-Muslims: get yourself converted to Islam; pay *jaziya*; accept death. In an Islamic State non-Muslims had to accept one of these three options." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Page 161: Aushuddho – "The early Sultans were eager to expand the sway of Islam by forcibly converting Hindus into Islam." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Book: *Bharuter Itihash*, by P. Maiti, Sreedhar Prakashini:

Page 117: Aushuddho – "There is an account that Alauddin attacked the capital of Mewar, Chittorgarh, to get Padmini, the beautiful wife of Rana Rattan Singh." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Page 139: Aushuddho – "There was a sense of aristocratic superiority in the *purdah* system. That is why upper-class Hindus adopted this system from upper-class Muslims. Another opinion has it that *purdah* came into practice to save Hindu women from Muslims. Most probably, *purdah* came into vogue because of both factors." *Shuddho* – Delete.

The most extensive deletions are ordered in regard to the chapter on "Aurangzeb's policy on religion". Every allusion to what he actually did to the Hindus, to their temples, to the very *leitmotif* of his rule – to spread the sway of Islam – are directed to be excised from the book. He is to be presented as one who had an aversion – an ordinary sort of aversion, almost a secular one – to music and dancing, to the presence of prostitutes in the Court, and that it is these things he banished. The only allusion to his having done anything in regard to Islam which is allowed to remain is that "By distancing himself from Akbar's policy of religious tolerance and policy of equal treatment, Aurangzeb caused damage to Mughal rule."

Book: *Swadesho Shobhyota*, by Dr. P. K. Basu and S. B.

Ghatak, Abhinav Prakashan:

Page 126: Aushuddho – "Some people believe that Alauddin's Mewar expedition was to get hold of Padmini, the wife of Rana Rattan Singh." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Page 145: Aushuddho – "Apart from this, because Islam used extreme, inhuman means to establish itself in India, this became an obstacle for the coming together of Indian and Islamic cultures." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Book: *Bharat Katha*, by G. Bhattacharya, Bulbul Prakashan:

Page 40: Aushuddho – "Muslims used to take recourse to torture and inhuman means to force their religious beliefs and practices on Indians." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Page 41: Aushuddho – "The liberal, humane elements in Islam held out hope for oppressed Hindus." *Shuddho* – The entire paragraph beginning with "the caste system among Hindus.... was attacked" is to be deleted. Instead write, "There was no place for casteism in Islam. Understandably, the influence of Islam created an awakening among Hindus against caste discrimination. Lower caste oppressed Hindus embraced Islam."

Page 77: Aushuddho – "His main task was to oppress non-believers, especially Hindus." *Shuddho* – This and the preceding sentence to be deleted.

Book: *Bharuter Itihash*, by A. C. Roy, published by Prantik:

Page 102: Aushuddho – "There is an account that Alauddin attacked Chittor to get the beautiful wife of Rana Rattan Singh, Padmini." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Page 164: Ashuddho – "It was his commitment to Islam which made him a fundamentalist." *Shuddho* – Delete.

Book: *Bharut Kahini*, by G. C. Roychoudhury, published by A. K. Sarkar and Co:

Page 130: Aushuddho – "That is why he adopted the policy

of converting Hindus to Islam – so as to increase the number of Muslims. Those Hindus who refused to discard their religion were indiscriminately massacred by him or his generals."
Shuddho – Delete.

In a word, no forcible conversions, no massacres, no destruction of temples. Just that Hinduism had created an exploitative, casteist society. Islam was egalitarian. Hence the oppressed Hindus embraced Islam !

Muslim historians of those times are in raptures at the heap of *Kafirs* who have been dispatched to hell. *Muslim* historians are forever lavishing praise on the ruler for the temples he has destroyed, for the hundreds of thousands he has got to see the light of Islam. Law books like *The Hedaya* prescribe exactly the options to which these little textbooks alluded. All whitewashed away.

Objective whitewash for objective history. And today if anyone seeks to restore truth to these textbooks, the shout, "Communal rewriting of history."

But there isn't just whitewash of Islam. For, after Islam, came another great emancipatory ideology – Marxism-Leninism.

The teachers in Bengal furnish extracts from the textbook for Class V:

"…. in Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba and in other East European countries, the workers and peasants are ruling the country after capturing power, whereas in U.S.A., England, France and Germany the owners of mills and factories are ruling the country."

"…. after the Revolution in Russia the first exploitation-free society was established."

"…. Islam and Christianity are the only religions which treated man with honour and equality…."

Thus, not just whitewash, hogwash too.

Devices to further the circular

As we have seen, the explicit part of the Circular issued by the West Bengal Government in 1989 in effect was that there must be no negative reference to Islamic rule in India. Although these were the very things which contemporary Islamic writers had celebrated, there must be no reference to the destruction of the temples by Muslim rulers, to the forcible conversion of Hindus, to the numerous other disabilities which were placed on the Hindu population. Along with the Circular, the passages which had to be removed were listed and substitute passages were specified. The passages which were ordered to be deleted contained, if anything, a gross understatement of the facts. On the other hand, passages which were sought to be inserted contained total falsehoods: that by paying *jizyah* Hindus could lead "normal lives" under an Islamic ruler like Alauddin Khalji !

A closer study of the textbooks which are today being used under the authority of the West Bengal Government shows a much more comprehensive, a much deeper design than that of merely erasing the cruelties of Islamic rule.

Of course, there is no reference to those cruelties. But in addition, the growth of the Aligarh Movement and its objectives, the role of Sir Syed Ahmad in founding this Movement, the role of the Muslim League, its close association with the British, its espousal of the Two Nation

doctrine – all these are almost entirely erased in the half a dozen books which teachers in Calcutta have been so kind as to send.

It was only in one book, *Sabhyatar Itihash* by Dr. Atul Chandra Ray, Prantik, 1998, for Class VIII, that there was a reference to the Muslim League, the Lahore Resolution, the Two Nation theory, and Jinnah's "Direct Action". Even in this book the only reference to Sir Syed Ahmad was one that projected him as a great, progressive religious reformer: "All his life he struggled against blind faith and tradition, conventional rituals, practices and ignorance." That he founded the Aligarh Movement, that he was the original proponent of the Two Nation theory, that he exhorted Muslims to stay away from the Congress, that he wrote essays followed by books followed by essays to establish in the eyes of the British how loyal Muslims had been through the 1857 Uprising, how loyal they were and would always be to the British because of their nature and their religion, that he gave very special "interpretations" to passages from the Quran to establish that it was the religious duty of Muslims to support and stand by the British rulers – to the point that if the British asked them to eat pork, they were by their religion duty bound to do so in good cheer[1]: not a word on any of this.

Similarly, while Ram Mohan Roy is mentioned, while Keshab Chandra Sen – in whom Max Muller had seen such hope for Christianising India ! – is mentioned, while Devendra Nath Tagore is mentioned in this "History of Civilisation", Bankim Chandra is *not* mentioned ! After all, for the constituency which our progressives have been wooing, Bankim Chandra, being the author of *Bande Mataram*, of *Anand Math*, is anathema. Many would think it natural that as such "Histories of World Civilisation" are

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[1] For illustrative extracts from Sir Syed's writings on these points see my *Indian Controversies*, ASA 1991, HarperCollins 1997, Chapter VII.

written in and for Bengal, Bengali personages – including K. C. Sen !–should figure more prominently than reformers and leaders from outside Bengal. But even they would be surprised by what the teachers point out in regard to the most widely used textbook: that while Swami Vivekananda gets one line, Karl Marx gets forty two !

In regard to our religion, the trick is threefold. The textbooks denigrate religion, attributing to it the evils which it serves the progressives' purpose to highlight. Second, in each of these instances the examples they give are linked by them to Hinduism. Third, among religions, Islam is always presented as the one, progressive, emancipatory religion. Of course, the final emancipation comes in the form of the Soviet Revolution of 1917 !

Itihash o' Bhugol, Pratham Bhag, West Bengal Shiksha Adhikar, Calcutta, 1993 is a book for Class III, that is for children of 7 or 8. It has the customary section on "*Vyaktigat Sampatti o' Das Pratha*" and it sets out the customary Marxist exposition. The emergence of two classes, rich and poor, is attributable to personal property and the profit motive....; to augment its growth, one class of society fights another class....; some lose out their property; others grab everything of theirs'....; those who lose out are made prisoners and employed as labourers; they become slaves; they are absolute paupers....; those who make them work like this become their *malik*....; gradually those *maliks*, without working, start enjoying the fruits of the labour of slaves....; thus society gets divided into rich and poor, owners and slaves; the rich and owners and craftsmen class of people start fleecing these slaves; not only are the latter denied their dues, they are also subjected to *atyachar*....; sometimes these poor, these slaves used to rebel when they could no longer bear the *atyachar;* to discipline them the rich created law, police and courts.... A proper preparation of the Class III child for abiding by the law !

On the next page this account is merged into the account

of "rituals and ceremonies of society." The illustration on the page shows Hindu *pundits* around a fire with the caption "*Rishis* performing *Yajna*". Having described the emergence of two classes, the oppression of one class and its being pushed into becoming slave-labour, having described law, police and courts as instruments of this oppression, the textbook now tells the Class III student "these priests devised and got busy in creating laws and rituals for worship. That is how scriptures were written. And they started teaching the children from these scriptures, and they themselves became the teachers. Gradually they established themselves at the top of the social ladder. That is how they became leaders of society. And they became the allies of those who were ruling the world." Not just the usual Marxist claptrap, the Marxist rendition of the Macaulay-Missionary-design: make them ashamed of the things they revere – their Gods, their scriptures, their language, Sanskrit; and make them hate the one group which has been charged with the task of continuing their religion and culture.

The theme is continued and the association of Hinduism with everything evil is deepened in the textbook, *Itihash o' Bhugol*, Part II (West Bengal Vidyalaya Shiksha Adhikar, 1995, Calcutta), meant for the Class IV students. On page 10 the standard account is given – one which has been called into serious question by current scholarship. Aryans come from the North-West.... They institute four castes, the Shudras are consigned to be the lowest caste. They were the original inhabitants of this land, of dark complexion.... No right to education....

That is on page 10. On page 17 we learn of the great emancipatory event. Muhammad is born. He establishes Islam.... It creates a great civilisation, a civilisation educationally, culturally advanced. It establishes a vast Empire – but because of internecine fighting in various parts, this Empire yields to the emergence of different states.

Two pages later again: Muhammad is born...., a great

Mahapurush...., his religion Islam means "Peace". He taught all to give alms to the poor, and to pay the worker his legitimate due. He taught, do not cause pain or suffering to slaves, do not take interest on loans. He stopped idolatry. These are the principal doctrines of Muhammad. Many accepted Muhammad's religion.... And then the insinuation slipped in: "All great men have taught peace.... but people have forgotten their message and are quarreling and fighting. The rich, instead of helping the poor, duped them, and added to their own wealth. They indulged in loot, blood-letting in the name of religion. When Jainism and Buddhism spread in India, the Brahmin *pundit*s saw danger. They thought that if men did not follow the rituals, they may not obey and care for them. Therefore, on the pretext of saving Hindu religion and to maintain their hold on society, they became desperate. They were helped by many kings. Thus the influence of Jainism and Buddhism declined and the influence of Hinduism increased."

That much is on page 20. On pages 25 and 26 this superimposition is carried further. The standard Marxist "thesis" is once again driven into the child. Peasants exploited.... surplus appropriated.... his cattle, land expropriated ...., suffering.... progressive immiserisation day by day...., and then, "in the name of God, the *pundits* extracted gifts for *puja* and festivals. The *pundits* became oppressive and began living off the labour of others, becoming exploiters and oppressors. They were helped by kings and landlords. Shudras, slaves and the poor suffer most from religious persecution. This is how the stratification of society between high and low started. Shudras became untouchables; there was no restriction on exploiting their services and every excuse was good enough for the men of higher castes to exploit and persecute the Shudras.... The upper caste men used to kill off Shudras and wipe out entire villages on any excuse whatsoever."

And there is an illustration on the page to reinforce the

message into the child's mind. Captioned, *Dharmiya Utpidan*, "Religious Persecution", it shows a man in a bush-shirt, flogging a poor person with a whip – in the foreground is a Brahmin, in a *dhoti*, with a *chutia,* a menacing frown, directing him to do so.

By predictable contrast, *Itihash (Prachin)*, West Bengal Shiksha Parishad, 1994, on page 94 gives an illustration of the ruins of Nalanda, it says how important these seats of learning were. But it is studiously silent on who it was that destroyed them ! After all, alluding to that would violate the Circular !

The Class III textbook, *Itihash o' Bhugol, Pratham Bhag*, at page 32, teaches the child, "With the emergence of personal property one section has been depriving the other. The differences between rich and poor have grown. Suffering has been created. The downtrodden have lost all their rights. They have been subjected to many indignities. Even now people are killing each other, even now a man exploits a fellow-being, even now there are wars, battles. If peace ever comes to this earth, if exploitation and oppression are stopped, if every man can enjoy equal happiness and peace, then how wonderful this earth would become."

This pattern – of sowing anger against the state of things and attributing that condition to the entities the Communists want to target – continues from one year to the next. *Itihash*, Part III, West Bengal Shiksha Adhikar, 1996, after giving the same sequence and "theses" of exploitation, of division of society, of religion as a hand-maiden of exploitation, turns to "the emergence of new consciousness". An exploitative order.... Brahmins wielding great influence.... Those of the working class, the Shudras pushed down.... no rights or dignity.... Shudras not even to perform religious rituals.... Exploitation.... Rebellion of Christian slaves.... Spartacus.... Shakes the very foundation of the Roman Empire.... After 600 years of Christ, a new religious creed that every man has equal rights, this religious creed was

preached by Hazrat Muhammad.... Ideas of great men abandoned.... Exploitation continues.

At last! Lenin, the Bolshevik Party.... "This is how the common man's revolt took place in November 1917 and an exploitation-less [*shoshan-mukt*] society of the working class was established. Tagore visited Russia in 1930 and said that if he had not visited Russia, he would have missed out on the most sacred place of pilgrimage...." The Chinese Revolution....

The Industrial Revolution in England.... Proprietors expropriate.... Labour is progressively immiserised.... Country becomes rich but is controlled by a few; the rest sink into misery, getting hardly anything, not even two square meals a day.... And then, on page 32, the Russian Revolution: "In November 1917 before the end of the First World War, the workers and peasants of the Russian Empire led by Lenin and his Bolshevik Party staged the Revolution and uprooted the Czarist Empire and thus established the first exploitation-less [*shoshan-mukt*] rule of Workers and Peasants in Soviet Russia...."

And then the Second World War: Hitler, Japan and Italy combined. Japan also was very greedy and ambitious, and planned to set up an Empire in Asia. The Axis came into conflict with "Britain, France and the American imperialists." "The issue," it tells the student, "was who will exploit and plunder the world. That is how the Second World War started...." Bengal Famine.... In 1941 Germany attacked Soviet Russia. The Russian people fought to defend the Motherland and finally defeated Hitler's Germany. Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.... After the end of the Second World War, the movement for freedom in colonies became vigorous.

Like this book, *Sabhyatar Itihash*, "The History of Civilisation," 1998, also presents the Russian Revolution as the culmination of that evolution. A remarkable, comprehensive Revolution....

While these books are published in 1995, 1998 etc., there is not a word in them about the purges under Stalin, about the fact that under him millions of Soviet citizens were killed, nor of the fact that millions more were killed under Maoist rule in China, there is not a word of the slave labour camps of these regimes. And, of course, there is not a word about what has happened to the Soviet Union, to Eastern Europe since then, nor about the great leap which China has executed away from the bankrupt Communist economic system.

Hence the design is not just what was set out in that Circular – to erase the evil that Islamic rulers heaped upon India and Indians. It is to attribute evil to the religion of our country, Hinduism; it is to present Islam as the great progressive force which arose; it is to lament the fact that humanity did not heed the teachings of progressive men like Muhammad – till the "remarkable and comprehensive" Russian Revolution of 1917 !

In Kerala the same sorts of efforts have been on, say the teachers. It is just that as parties have been alternating in forming governments, it has not been possible to push one line for long. The recent fracas over the Minimum Levels of Learning project illustrates the position, they say.

The 1986 National Education Policy emphasised the need to urgently lay down minimum levels of competence which children completing different stages of education must achieve. A Committee was set up in 1990. It specified the competencies which students must acquire in Standards I to V. The State Government revised the curriculum and textbooks accordingly. The new curriculum and textbooks were introduced in larger and larger number of schools from 1993.

In 1996 the Marxists came to power again. They once again revised the texts and curricula for Standards I to IV. The textbooks and curricula which had been introduced just three years earlier and which were in the process of

being extended over the state were dumped. The textbooks were prepared by teachers who were actively associated with the Sasthra Sahitya Parishad, a Marxist sponsored organization. "Public educationists and teachers' organizations strongly criticised the new textbooks," teachers write. "The main criticism was that the textbooks were silent in regard to national leaders, social reformers, ancient poets and Indian culture. Stories and poems relating to Ramayana and Mahabharatha were left out in the name of secularism."

As is usual with sclerotic movements, things are often taken to ridiculous lengths. The teachers give an example. A poem by the leading poet of Kerala Mahakavi Ikkitham Achuthan Namboodiripad was prescribed for study, they write. In it, anxious and pining for her son, the mother asks whether anyone has seen her son, *"Ambadi kannante niramane"* – my son, the colour of Krishna, which is dark. This line has been deleted, and substituted by *"Njaval pazhathinte chelane"* – Njval pazham is a fruit, which, the teachers point out, is red in colour. "This change was done without the prior permission of the renowned poet," they write. "It was done to ensure that the name of Lord Krishna does not occur in the poem." Furthermore, they point out, the 1986 National Education Policy had identified a set of core components. In preparing the new curriculum the ones among these which related to the History of the Indian Freedom Movement, the content essential to nurture a national identity, the items dealing with India's common cultural heritage, as well as those relating to the removal of social barriers were all erased from the curriculum. In the lesson on Gandhiji in the textbook for Class IV, he is not represented as the leader of the struggle for freedom, but merely as one who loved the poor. For this an incident from his days in South Africa is recalled. And, the teachers say, he is deliberately referred to as *ayal*, which means "he". The word is a disrespectful one, they write. It is not used

for an honourable person, an elder.

With the sway which Marxists have ensured over the Education Department, each facet at every level will be subjected to the same sort of alterations and substitutions that we have encountered in Bengal – all that is necessary is that the progressives' Government remains in power, and that the rest keep looking the other way.

"Let us look forward to the positive aspects"

The position of these "academics" in Bengal has, of course, been helped by the fact that the CPI(M) has been in power there for so long. But their sway has not been confined to the teaching and "research" institutions of that State. It is no surprise, therefore, to see the same "line" being poured down the throats of students at the national level. And so strong is the tug of intellectual fashion, so lethal can the controlling mafia be to the career of an academic that often, even though the academic may not quite subscribe to their propositions and "theses," he will end up reciting those propositions. Else his manuscript will not be accepted as a textbook by the NCERT, for instance, it will not be reviewed....

S. N. Jha's *Society, State and Government* is an NCERT textbook for Class XI students.[1] This author too is from that citadel of the "committed writing" which we are considering, the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Working in that institution, among those controllers, whatever his views, the text he produces for acculturating the young fits the pattern.

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[1] National Council of Educational Research and Training, Delhi, 1996. Unless indicated otherwise, page numbers in this chapter refer to this publication.

The book does deign to mention that the Soviet Union has collapsed, that East Germany has merged with West Germany. But even in 1996 it regurgitates rationalisations for the Soviet system, and when it cannot avoid mentioning the collapse of the Soviet Union and of other "socialist" States, it dutifully puts the word "collapse" within inverted commas !

There is the great breakthrough, as always: "Socialism argued and elaborated so eloquently by a number of scholars...., remained in the realm of ideas till 1917, when the ideas formed the concrete basis for the Russian Revolution," the Professor tells the students. "It provided an opportunity to organise the State and the government in a way that the ideals of socialism could be attained. The Chinese Revolution in 1949 was another landmark in the organisation of socialist States. They provided the models for many States that adopted the socialist form."[2]

The subliminal association so well known to propagandists and advertisers: "The decade[s] of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions were also the period of decolonisation.... The experiment with socialism found favour in the Third World."[3]

The phenomenal spread: "Authentic surveys published in 1984 suggested that the 15 socialist States accounted for about a quarter of the world's territory and about a third of the world's population. They spread in almost all the continents of the world. Many of them made a place for themselves in the world on the basis of achievements in different fields – economic, social, political and military...."[4]

The economic basis of society and governance: hence, the nationalisation of the means of production, leading to workers' control over the forces of production....

The special ways of organising socialist States, the

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[2]p. 83. [3]p. 83. [4]p. 83.

jettisoning of institutions and mores which are appurtenances of non-socialist States – States that are not organised around an agreed ideology – and are to be found in them because they have not done the things that socialist States have ensured. Thus, the special way of organising political parties in socialist States:

> "Since socialist societies will have achieved a stage where, in place of multiplicity of classes, there will be only one class, i.e. the proletariat, there is no place for multiplicity of political parties. There is also a single ideology to be pursued. Socialist societies usually have a single political Party. In some such states the number of parties had been more than one."[5]

True, some socialist States had two or more parties, the textbook says, but the other parties were adjuncts of the main Party and strove to further the same ideology. Moreover, the political Party in such a State does not work only for "short-term electoral gains in electoral field." "One important role," the textbook says, "is to act as a vanguard of the socialist ideals and not only represent it, but also ensure that it is reflected in society and polity" – in any other system a Party performing this kind of a role would be denounced as a "thought-police," as being the informer and enforcer of a totalitarian State. But our text gilds the role in words that would probably embarrass even a citizen who had been all-commitment in the days of the Soviet Union ! The Party ensures "a personal liaison" between the Party leadership and the armed forces. It also "influences the decisions about appointment of people in important institutions...."[6]

With a role such as this to be performed, the Party cannot allow itself to be hobbled by bourgeois notions of loose, unfocussed functioning. Hence, says our textbook, in words

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[5]p. 85. [6]p. 85.

that seem to have been taken straight out of Stalin's manual,

> "Such a conception of the role of the Party will naturally require a strong and firm leadership to pursue its goals. In order to promote its ideology and serve the interests of the society, it requires a disciplined and unified, rather than a fragmented and loose structure. The Party has a monolithic structure."[7]

Stalin ensconced, Lenin is to be recalled ! And so, the standard accompaniment to the monolith:

> "Requirements of Party structure and participation of Party members are reconciled by the Principle of Democratic Centralism, enunciated by Lenin. Firm leadership and a unified structure of the Party, however, do not mean that the participation of the members of the Party, i.e. the workers, is in any way restricted...."[8]

Elections are held at all levels within the Party. There is freedom to air one's views.... "Thus the Party organisation combined the participation of members and units of the Party with strict discipline and united structure," says the text. "The cadre could 'thus act as transmitters of central policy and mass demands, familiarise the members with the day-to-day problems of the villages, help create Party branches and participate in a mass education movement.'...."[9]

Nor is that all to democracy within the Party. "The individual members can bypass the leadership in the organisation and can appeal and complain to higher bodies in the Party," says the text – the mountains of evidence of what happened to individuals who tried to do anything of the sort notwithstanding. "Individual appeals and complaints can be made to the highest level, right up to the

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[7]pp. 85-86. [8]p. 86. [9]p. 86.

Chairman of the Central Committee...." Almost as welcoming as the *darbar-i-am* of Mughal rulers ![10]

This much having been internalised, it is time to make a little concession to reality. Hence, The Theory having been adumbrated at such length, the flaw that arose in implementation is noted !

> "Such an organisation of a Party is highly centralised from top to the bottom, as perhaps it is intended to be. In actual working, this arrangement does not encourage participation from lower levels, that it seeks to do in theory. The higher levels of the Party get isolated from the realities of the society and is [*sic.*] not quite sensitive to the socio-economic and cultural changes taking place in society. The Party organisation becomes rigid and also top-heavy. In such a situation, the political Party is unable to perform the important function of acting as a link between the people and the government. Party becomes part of the government. Many other kinds of aberrations (such as corruption and arrogant leadership) also occur, that are typical of a top-heavy organisation which is not subject to popular control. After the collapse of the USSR many weaknesses in the working of CPSU have come to light."[11]

Next, elections as we know them turn out to be as out of sync, if not as out of place as democratic political parties:

> "Since the socialist society claims to have a single economic class, that of the proletariat (i.e. the working class), there is no competition among different economic classes. The single ideology serves the interests of the single class. Actual process of elections, therefore, is within the different units of the Party organisation. Once such electoral choice is ensured in elections to governmental institutions, like the legislature, are limited to the Party candidates [*sic.*]. There is no contest between candidates of different parties...."[12]

For the same reason all this clap-trap of countervailing institutions, of checks and balances, of separation of powers which mars bourgeois democracies is done away with:

> "Since the organisation of power is based upon strong commitment to [a] single ideology, there is no apprehension about concentration of power. State power is vested in the representative bodies at each level of the State organisation. Representative bodies have all the powers, at least formally, and it is [*sic.*] not shared by the executive and judicial branches of the government...."[13]

"Strong commitment to [a] single ideology" is put in a fashion that would make it seem to be a voluntary commitment by the citizenry at large ! And those bodies elected in that way special to socialist States become "*representative* bodies" ! Eliminating even the "*apprehension* of concentration of power" !

What holds for notions such as separation of powers, holds, *a fortiori,* for an institution such as the judiciary, The whole populace having committed itself to that ideology, the ideology having found in The Party an instrument for its realisation, the Party having ensured democracy within itself, the whole arrangement cannot be put to the mercy of a bourgeois institution such as the judiciary ! Hence,

> "According to Marxist analysis, law and justice, along with other functions and organs of the State, reflect socio-economic conditions of the society. In a socialist society, therefore, the judiciary also takes part in 'building of socialism and communism'. According to this conception, judiciary is the protector of the ideology. Law serves to 'enforce political decisions'. States' policies are more important than law. Instead of protecting the rights and freedom of the individual, law protects the social interests. The State and the party is [*sic.*] the

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[13] p. 87

protector of the rights of citizens and the institutions of government represent the interests of the society. Under this system, the judiciary does not act as the 'guardian' of the Constitution, as it is in the case of India, or the US."[14]

That leaves the judges free to concentrate on "the other function" of the judiciary !

> "The other function of the judiciary is to ensure that whatever laws and rules are made by the government are enforced properly. The judiciary is a part and parcel of the set of institutions that are responsible for protecting the socialist society and State system. Thus it is the rule enforcement function of the judiciary that is emphasised more."[15]

The logic subsumes the apex of the structure:

> "There is no such highest court of justice in the socialist State to perform such functions of acting as the 'guardian' of the Constitution (except in Yugoslavia where a court existed). As we have seen above, the socialist State does not advocate 'separation of powers' as is the case with a [*sic.*] Constitution of USA. Only institution [*sic.*] that has powers to decide on question of 'constitutionality' is [*sic.*] the representative assemblies or their presidiums. Representative bodies in Rumania and Hungary set up special bodies to perform this function. Socialist States have an institution called procuracy which supervises the observance of the Constitution in terms of 'socialist legality'. This is a centralised body and is responsible to the representative bodies or their presidiums."[16]

Vishinsky would acclaim that portrayal ! Notice the academic neutrality: *both* "constitutionality" and "socialist legality" are put within inverted commas ! Notice too the characterisation of socialist legislatures and presidia as

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[14]p. 88. [15]p. 88. [16]p. 89.

"representative bodies" !

As the book is being put out in the 1990s, and that too in Delhi, one cannot entirely ignore the fate which has overtaken the Great Experiment. But in spite of everything that is known about the States which were founded in its name, our academic deems it fit not to rush to any hasty conclusion about the collapse. He remarks,

> "Why did this disintegration take place? Which forces were responsible for it? These are complex questions that will be analysed by commentators. It is enough to note here that the socialist State and form of government has suffered a serious set back."[17]

In any event, he counsels the student in the end,

> "Let us not be carried away by the recent developments but look forward to the positive aspects of the Socialist form of State. With the growth of the Socialist Block as an alternative framework, the consciousness about the socialist concerns was high all over the world. Even the non-socialist block had to bring about changes in its policies and became sensitive to social concerns. The socialist State presented a new picture of hope to the countries of the Third World when they gained independence. The Socialist Block helped maintain a balance in international politics, that helped the states of the Third World in the process of consolidation in the initial phases, when it was needed most. The Soviet-help that India received, both politically and economically, is well known in the context of consolidation of democracy, as well as for the protection of its external frontiers. After the collapse of the USSR as a country and as a balancing force, there are apprehensions about the impact of a Uni-Polar World that has emerged."[18]

Woe to the gods that the Utopia has receded, or rather, "has suffered a serious setback" !

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[17]p. 90. [18]p. 90.

Insinuate falsehood, explain away the truth

The closer one gets to Delhi, or the greater the chances that the student would have been exposed to general information, the more delusive these propagandists are. But the "Party Line" they hawk remains the same: there is no such thing as Hinduism, it is Brahmanism; Brahmanism equals intolerance and persecution – of Buddhists, Jains, and of course the Shudras; Islam equals peace, equality, brotherhood, the ascent towards monotheism; the Left means equality, freedom and everything nice; Revolution means the rule of Workers and Peasants !

"The Brahmanical reaction began as a result of the policy of Ashoka," says one of the more important of these "eminent historians", R. S. Sharma in *Ancient India,* the NCERT textbook for Class XI students.[1] "There is no doubt that Ashoka adopted a tolerant policy and asked the people to respect even the brahmanas. But he prohibited the killing of animals and birds, and derided superficial rituals performed by women. This naturally affected the income of the brahmanas. The anti-sacrifice attitude of Buddhism and of Ashoka naturally brought loss to the brahmanas, who lived on the gifts made to them in various kinds of

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[1]National Council of Educational Research and Training, Delhi, 1996.

sacrifices. Hence, in spite of the tolerant policy of Ashoka, the brahmanas developed some kind of an antipathy to him. Obviously they were not satisfied with his tolerant policy. They really wanted a policy that would favour them and uphold the existing interests and privileges. Some of the new kingdoms that arose on the ruins of the Maurya empire, were ruled by the brahmanas...."[2]

"Naturally," "obviously," "they really wanted," and all that yielding just "some kind of an antipathy" ! How are the propositions "natural" and "obvious"? Because they are repeated – thrice even in these few lines ! And because they are tautologies: Brahmins lived off gifts made to them at sacrifices; Ashoka prohibited sacrifices; obviously, this would have affected the income of the Brahmins; therefore, naturally, the Brahmins would have had "some kind of an antipathy" towards Ashoka ! What proportion of the income of Brahmins came from gifts made at sacrifices – no word on that. If they really had become that addicted to sacrifices, what proportion of the people would have obeyed a prohibition; how, given the primitive modes of communication and transport, given the extremely thin veneer of the State's presence 2300 years ago, how Ashoka would have had his prohibition enforced – no word on that either. But "obviously," "naturally," "really," it is !

Evidence apart, notice the denunciation-by-juxtaposition. Hinduism equals "Brahmanism". Brahmins are fixated on their incomes. Incomes come from sacrifices. Hence, the "antipathy" to Ashoka is inherent in Brahmanism-equals-Hinduism. And what about the destruction by Islamic invaders and zealots of every Buddhist structure in sight – in India, of course, but also in Central Asia and Afghanistan? R. S. Sharma has all of two sentences on that:

"For their riches the monasteries came to be coveted by the

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[2]R. S. Sharma, *Ancient India*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1996, p. 112.

Turkish invaders. They became special targets of the invaders' greed. The Turks killed a large number of Buddhist monks in Nalanda, although some of the monks managed to escape to Nepal and Tibet."[3]

Full stop ! First, by attributing the destruction to the usual explanation – "the economic motive" – this "eminent historian" glides over the fundamental religious impulse which spurred the Turk – Buddhism had become synonymous with idolatry in spite of the Buddha, and Islam obligated the believer to destroy the places of worship of other religions, in particular to pulverise their idols. Second, by gliding over this basic belief, the eminent historian puts the Turk at par with the Brahmin – the former was acting out his greed just as the latter had done before him: Q.E.D. !

And invariably there is another kind of "balancing" also. These two sentences about the Turks covering three lines in the textbook are preceded by an entire paragraph six times the length about the persecution of Buddhists by Hindu rulers ! And in that paragraph the motivation of the Hindu rulers is entirely religious !

Now, it is not that this historian erases the internal corruption which had sapped Buddhism. The Buddhist monks had got cut off from the mainstream of the people's life, he says – "they gave up Pali, the language of the people, and took to Sanskrit, the language of the intellectuals," he says. They took to idol worship. The rich offerings of devotees supplemented by royal grants led the monks to adopt the easy life – and then there were women in monasteries: all in all, the monasteries became "centres of corrupt practices which Gautama Buddha had strictly prohibited"[4] : another of those unfortunate "failures in implementation" – like Stalin's massacres in the case of

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

Marxism-Leninism perhaps?

But even in regard to this degeneration, guess who is to blame, guess what this degeneration was? "We find that in the beginning every religion is inspired by the spirit of reform," the historian tells us, "but eventually it succumbs to rituals and ceremonies it originally denounced. Buddhism underwent a similar metamorphosis. *It became a victim to the evils of brahmanism against which it had fought in the beginning.*"[5] Hence: the original seed of evil is in "brahmanism", indeed it is evil *per se* ; and Buddhism lost out because it fell back into that cesspool.... The standard mode of argument on every controversy today: for 150 years, Missionaries denounced Hinduism on the charge that it demarcates people by caste, they exalted Christianity for exorcising caste from among its followers; and now, when they fear that their flock is deserting them because they have in fact continued all those distinctions – separate pews for the lower castes, few OBCs in the hierarchy etc. – and they must demand reservations for "Dalit Christians," a category they were saying did not exist by definition, guess who is to blame: it is all the result of the enveloping Hinduism, they allege !

The same "line" is peddled by Sharma's comradely historian, Satish Chandra, in his companion NCERT textbook, for Class XI students, entitled *Medieval India*.[6] Here also we learn that "not only were the tenets of Buddhism and Jainism challenged at the intellectual level, there was on occasions outbreak of violence and forcible occupation of Buddhist and Jain temples." Satish Chandra also talks of the "internal developments in Buddhism" – the reversion to speculation about metaphysical questions, to the recitation of *mantras*, the relapse into mysticism, to

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[5]*Ibid.*, p. 78.

[6]National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, 1996.

secret rites etc. The sum total of it all? "Thus," says Satish Chandra, "Buddhism did not so much decline, *as it assumed forms which made it indistinguishable from Hinduism*" ![7]

In a word, both corruption and evil on the one hand and exploitation on the other are germane to, they are inherent in Hinduism: Hinduism is Brahmanism; Brahmanism is that "ism" which serves the interests of the Brahmins; these interests can only be served by the exploitation and oppression of people of lower castes. Hence, Hinduism is necessarily an arrangement for the exploitation and oppression of the mass of people. Q.E.D. !

By contrast, the aggression, the butchery, the devastations committed by Islamic rulers are sanitised through a three-layered filter. First, the devastation is attributed to individuals and not the religion. Among individuals, it is made out that just a few individuals – a few isolated exceptions – indulged in it. Third, that they committed aggression, destroyed temples, pulverised idols, not because of some religious belief but because, being rulers, they had to put down their opponents who happened to be Hindus; and because they were motivated by mundane considerations like greed for the riches of temples, the need to establish political sway over the conquered territory etc.

Thus Class XI students reading Satish Chandra's *Medieval India* learn that "in the early phase of the conquest many cities were sacked and temples formed a special target *partly to justify the conquest and partly to seize the fabulous treasures they were supposed to contain*. During this period, a number of Hindu temples were converted into mosques....".[8] Allah forbid that Islam might have had something to do with any of this !

Satish Chandra goes on to gild the *Shariat* itself ! He says, "Their policy towards temples and places of worship

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[7]Satish Chandra, *Medieval India*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1996, p. 32.
[8]*Ibid.*, p. 85.

of the Hindus, Jains, etc. rested on the Muslim law (*Sharia*) which forbade new places of worship being built 'in opposition to Islam.' But it allowed the repair of old temples 'since buildings cannot last for ever.' This meant that there was no ban on erecting temples in the villages since *there were no practices of Islam there*. Similarly temples could be built within the privacy of homes. But this liberal policy was not followed in times of war. Thus the enemies of Islam, whether human beings or Gods, were fought and destroyed. In times of peace, however, within the Turkish territories and in those areas where the *rajas* had submitted to the Muslim rule, the Hindus practiced their religion openly and ostentatiously."[9]

Notice the sleights of hand. The repair of temples is allowed ! Temples can be constructed in villages ! Temples can be constructed "within the privacy of homes" ! Thus "liberal policy" is the norm which is departed from only in times of war ! And the ones who are fought and destroyed at such times are in any case "the enemies of Islam" ! In times of peace, which are the times that prevailed normally, the norm prevails – that is, "the Hindus practice their religion openly and ostentatiously" !

Each of these assertions is a blatant falsehood. But these historians, having, through their control of institutions, set the standards of intellectual correctness, the one who questions the falsehoods, even though he does so by citing the writings of the best known Islamic historians of those very times, he is the one who is in the wrong.

Satish Chandra continues. "Despite the pressure of a section of the orthodox theologians, this policy of broad toleration was maintained during the Sultanate," he says, "though with occasional lapses".[10] Three insinuations in that brief sentence: first, that the pressure for aggression

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

came only from theologians, only from orthodox theologians, only from a section of the orthodox theologians; the policy during Sultanate was of "broad toleration"; third, that such aggression as took place was one of those "occasional lapses".

And then the customary balancing: "sometimes, prisoners of war were converted, or criminals exempted from punishment if they accepted Islam," says Satish Chandra. "Firuz executed a Brahmin for abusing the Prophet of Islam [an assertion which is itself belied by the contemporary accounts – the Brahmin was executed, not for abusing the Prophet of Islam but, as we shall see, for not converting to Islam and stopping the observances of his own religion]. On the other hand, there were some instances of conversion of Muslims to Hinduism. Thus, Chaitanya, the great Vaishnava reformer, converted a number of Muslims. The theologians, of course, considered apostasy from Islam to be a capital crime."[11]

How many did Chaitanya convert? And how does that number compare with the lakhs upon lakhs of Hindus whose conversion the Muslim historians of the time celebrated? Do only "theologians" consider apostasy from Islam to be a capital crime? Is that not something mandated by the Prophet himself? Do *hadis* after *hadis* not recount how the Prophet himself dealt with the persons who, having accepted Islam, went back to their traditional observances? Does Allah Himself not command,

> "Then, if they turn their backs, take them, and slay them wherever you find them."[12]

Did the Prophet leave any doubt about the duty of believers when he said, "Whoever changes his Islamic

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[11]*Ibid.*, p. 86.
[12]*Quran*, 4.91.

religion, kill him"?[13] And does *hadis* after *hadis* not testify that the Prophet enforced this injunction? Recall what happened to members of the tribe of Ukl. Some persons from the tribe came to the Prophet and embraced Islam. The climate of Medina did not suit them. The Prophet ordered them to go to the herd of milch-camel and drink the milk and urine as medicine. After recovering from their illness, they reverted from Islam, killed the shepherd and ran off with the camels. The Prophet had them caught. He then ordered their hands and legs to be cut off, their eyes to be branded with heated pieces of iron. He ordered that the cut hands and legs should not be cauterised so that they bleed to death. "And when they asked for water to drink," records the *hadis*, "they were not given water."[14]

The Prophet having himself acted and commanded thus, is that not the *Sunnah* which it is mandatory for every Muslim to follow? On the other hand, is there any injunction to that effect in any Hindu text? Is there any Hindu religious teacher who acted that way towards those who chose some other religion? Have the Hindus honoured, to say nothing of following any of their saints on the ground that he acted that way? But parity it is !

And in regard to the killing of that Brahmin which our eminent historian Satish Chandra attributes to the Brahmin having abused the Prophet of Islam – the *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* of Shamsu'd-Din bin Siraju'd-Din, the courtier of Firuz Shah himself, describes the execution as follows:

"A report was brought to the Sultan that there was in Delhi an old Brahman (*zunar dar*) who persisted in publicly performing the worship of idols in his house; and that people of the city, both Musulmans and Hindus, used to resort to his house to worship the idol. The Brahman had constructed a wooden tablet

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[13]*Sahih Bukhari*, 84.57.
[14]*Sahih Bukhari*, 82.794-7; *Sahih Muslim*, 4130-7.

(*muhrak*), which was covered within and without with paintings of demons and other objects.... An order was accordingly given that the Brahman, with his tablet, should be brought into the presence of the Sultan at Firozabad. The judges and doctors and elders and lawyers were summoned, and the case of the Brahman was submitted for their opinion. Their reply was that the provisions of the Law were clear: the Brahman must either become a Musulman or be burned. The true faith was declared to the Brahman, and the right course pointed out, but he refused to accept it. Orders were given for raising a pile of faggots before the door of the *darbar*. The Brahman was tied hand and foot and cast into it; the tablet was thrown on top and the pile was lighted. The writer of this book was present at the *darbar* and witnessed the execution. The tablet of the Brahman was lighted in two places, at his head and at his feet; the wood was dry, and the fire first reached his feet, and drew from him a cry, but the flames quickly enveloped his head and consumed him. Behold the Sultan's strict adherence to law and rectitude, how he would not deviate in the least from its decrees !"

"On the whole," says Satish Chandra, "conversions to Islam were not effected with the strength of the sword. If that was so, the Hindu population of the Delhi region would have been the first to be converted. The Muslim rulers had realised that the Hindu faith was too strong to be destroyed by force. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, the famous Sufi saint of Delhi, observed, 'Some Hindus know that Islam is a true religion but they do not embrace Islam.' Barani also says that attempt to use force had no effect on the Hindus."[15]

Satish Chandra's explanation for conversions is as follows:"Conversions to Islam were due to political gains or economic advantages, or [to] improve one's social position. Sometimes when an important ruler or a tribal chief converted, his example was followed by his subjects." Satish Chandra says that sometimes "Sufi saints" also played

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[15]Satish Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

a role, "though they were generally unconcerned with conversions, and welcomed both the Hindus and Muslims to their discourses" – if only this eminent historian were to read the accounts of these Sufis, he would learn how they acted as the advance scouts of the armies of Islam ! Hence Satish Chandra's exculpatory conclusion: "conversions were thus due to personal, political, and in some cases, to regional factors, as in the Punjab, East Bengal etc."[16]

How do these assertions compare with what Islamic historians themselves said at that time? What was the extent according to them of these "occasional lapses"? Most important, what did they say was the motivation which spurred the rulers of the time?

Were all these authors also communalists?

"There can be no doubt that the fall of Buddhism in India was due to the invasions of the Musalmans," writes the author. "Islam came out as the enemy of the *'But'*. The word *'But,'* as everybody knows, is an Arabic word and means an idol. Not many people, however, know that the derivation of the word *'But'* is the Arabic corruption of Buddha. Thus the origin of the word indicates that in the Moslem mind idol worship had come to be identified with the Religion of the Buddha. To the Muslims, they were one and the same thing. The mission to break the idols thus became the mission to destroy Buddhism. Islam destroyed Buddhism not only in India but wherever it went. Before Islam came into being Buddhism was the religion of Bactria, Parthia, Afghanistan, Gandhar and Chinese Turkestan, as it was of the whole of Asia...."

A communal historian of the RSS-school?

But Islam struck at Hinduism also. How is it that it was able to fell Buddhism in India but not Hinduism? Hinduism had State-patronage, says the author. The Buddhists were so persecuted by the "Brahmanic rulers", he writes, that, when Islam came, they converted to Islam: this swelled the ranks of Muslims but in the same stroke drained those of Buddhism. But the far more important cause was that while the Muslim invaders butchered both – Brahmins as well as

Buddhist monks – the nature of the priesthood in the case of the two religions was different – "and the difference is so great that it contains the whole reason why Brahmanism survived the attack of Islam and why Buddhism did not."

For the Hindus, every Brahmin was a potential priest. No ordination was mandated. Neither was anything else. Every household carried on rituals – oblations, recitation of particular *mantras,* pilgrimages, each Brahmin family made memorising some Veda its very purpose.... By contrast, Buddhism had instituted ordination, particular training etc. for its priestly class. Thus, when the invaders massacred Brahmins, Hinduism continued. But when they massacred the Buddhist monks, the religion itself was killed.

Describing the massacres of the latter and the destruction of their *vihars,* universities, places of worship, the author writes,

"The Musalman invaders sacked the Buddhist Universities of Nalanda, Vikramshila, Jagaddala, Odantapuri to name only a few. They raised to the ground Buddhist monasteries with which the country was studded. The monks fled away in thousands to Nepal, Tibet and other places outside India. A very large number were killed outright by the Muslim commanders. How the Buddhist priesthood perished by the sword of the Muslim invaders has been recorded by the Muslim historians themselves. Summarising the evidence relating to the slaughter of the Buddhist Monks perpetrated by the Musalman General in the course of his invasion of Bihar in 1197 AD, Mr. Vincent Smith says, '....Great quantities of plunder were obtained, and the slaughter of the "shaven headed Brahmans", that is to say the Buddhist monks, was so thoroughly completed, that when the victor sought for someone capable of explaining the contents of the books in the libraries of the monasteries, not a living man could be found who was able to read them.' 'It was discovered, we are told, that the whole of that fortress and city was a college, and in the Hindi tongue they call a college Bihar.'

"Such was the slaughter of the Buddhist priesthood

perpetrated by the Islamic invaders. The axe was struck at the very root. For by killing the Buddhist priesthood, Islam killed Buddhism. This was the greatest disaster that befell the religion of the Buddha in India...."

The writer? B. R. Ambedkar.[1]

But today the fashion is to ascribe the extinction of Buddhism to the persecution of Buddhists by Hindus, to the destruction of their temples by the Hindus. One point is that the Marxist historians who have been perpetrating this falsehood have not been able to produce even an iota of evidence to substantiate the concoction. In one typical instance, Romila Thapar had cited three inscriptions. The indefatigable Sita Ram Goel looked them up. Two of these turned out to have absolutely no connection with Buddhist *viharas* or their destruction, and the one that did deal with an object being destroyed had been held by authorities to have been a concoction; in any event, it told a story which was as different from what the historian had insinuated as day from night.

Some Jain priests had taken over a place where a *Shivalinga* was worshipped; the *Shaivite* priests had asked them to vacate the place; the Jain priests had said they would do so if the Shaivites could perform a miracle; the miracle had been performed; the Shaivite priests had thereupon reoccupied the place and reinstalled their idol; the case had been referred to the Jain King who ruled over the area, and he had upheld what the Shaivites had done. Goel repeatedly asked the historian to point to any additional evidence or to elucidate how the latter had suppressed the import that the inscription in its entirety conveyed. He waited in vain.

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[1]B. R. Ambedkar, "The decline and fall of Buddhism," *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches,* Volume III, Government of Maharashtra, 1987, pp. 229-38.

Marxists cite only two other instances of Hindus having destroyed Buddhist temples. These too it turns out yield to completely contrary explanations. Again Marxists have been asked repeatedly to explain the construction they have been circulating – to no avail. Equally important, Sita Ram Goel invited them to cite any Hindu text which orders Hindus to break the places of worship of other religions – as the Bible does, as a pile of Islamic manuals does. He asked them to name a single person who has been honoured by the Hindus because he broke such places – the way Islamic historians and lore have glorified every Muslim ruler and invader who did so. A snooty silence has been the only response.[2]

But I am on the other point. Once they had occupied academic bodies, once they had captured universities and thereby determined what will be taught, which books will be prescribed, what questions would be asked, what answers will be acceptable, these historians came to decide what history had actually been ! As it suits their current convenience and politics to make out that Hinduism also has been intolerant, they will glide over what Ambedkar says about the catastrophic effect that Islamic invasions had on Buddhism, they will completely suppress what he said of the nature of these invasions and of Muslim rule in his *Thoughts on Pakistan*,[3] but insist on reproducing his denunciations of "Brahmanism," and his view that the Buddhist India established by the Mauryas was systematically invaded and finished by Brahmin rulers.

Thus, they suppress facts, they concoct others, they suppress what an author has said on one matter even as

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[2]The exchanges are reproduced in Appendix 4 of Sita Ram Goel's *Hindu Temples : What Happened to Them : The Islamic Evidence*, Voice of India, 1993.

[3]B. R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Pakistan*, Thacker and Company, Bombay, 1941.

they insist that what he has said on another be taken as gospel truth. And when anyone attempts to point out what had in fact happened, they rise in chorus: a conspiracy to rewrite history, they shout, a plot to distort history, they scream. But they are the ones who have been distorting it in the first place – by suppressing the truth, by planting falsehoods.

And these "theses" of their's are recent concoctions. Recall the question of the disappearance of Buddhist monasteries. How did the grand-father, so to say, of present Marxist historians, D. D. Kosambi explain that extinguishing?[4] The original doctrine of the Buddha had degenerated into lamaism, Kosambi wrote. And the monasteries had "remained tied to the specialised and concentrated long-distance 'luxury' trade of which we read in the *Periplus*. This trade died out to be replaced by general and simpler local barter with settled villages. The monasteries, having fulfilled their economic as well as religious function, disappeared too." And the people lapsed ! "The people whom they had helped lead out of savagery (though plenty of aborigines survive in the Western Ghats to this day), to whom they had given their first common script and common language, use of iron, and of the plough," Kosambi wrote, "had never forgotten their primeval cults."

The standard Marxist "explanation" – the economic cause, the fulfilling of historical functions and thereafter disappearing, right to the remorse at the lapsing into "primeval cults". But today, these "theses" won't do. Today the need is to make people believe that Hindus too were intolerant, that Hindus also destroyed temples of others....

Or take another figure – one saturated with our history, culture, religion. He also wrote of that region – Afghanistan and beyond. The people of those areas did not destroy

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[4]For the following, D. D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1962, 1983 reprint, p. 100.

either Buddhism or the structures associated with it, he wrote, till one particular thing happened. What was this? He recounted,

> "In very ancient times this Turkish race repeatedly conquered the western provinces of India and founded extensive kingdoms. They were Buddhists, or would turn Buddhists after occupying Indian territory. In the ancient history of Kashmir there is mention of these famous Turkish emperors – Hushka, Yushka, and Kanishka. It was this Kanishka who founded the Northern School of Buddhism called Mahayana. Long after, the majority of them took to Muhammadanism and completely devastated the chief Buddhistic seats of Central Asia such as Kandhar and Kabul. Before their conversion to Muhammadanism they used to imbibe the learning and culture of the countries they conquered, and by assimilating the culture of other countries would try to propagate civilisation. But ever since they became Muhammadans, they have only the instinct of war left in them; they have not got the least vestige of learning and culture; on the contrary, the countries that come under their sway gradually have their civilisation extinguished. In many places of modern Afghanistan and Kandhar etc., there yet exist wonderful Stupas, monasteries, temples and gigantic statues built by their Buddhist ancestors. As a result of Turkish admixture and their conversion to Muhammadanism, those temples etc. are almost in ruins, and the present Afghans and allied races have grown so uncivilised and illiterate that, far from imitating those ancient works of architecture, they believe them to be the creation of super-natural spirits like the Jinn etc....."

The author? The very one the secularists tried to appropriate three-four years ago – Swami Vivekananda.

And look at the finesse of these historians. They maintain that such facts and narratives must be swept under the carpet in the interest of national integration: recalling them will offend Muslims, they say, doing so will sow rancour against Muslims in the minds of Hindus, they say. Simultaneously they insist on concocting the myth of Hindus destroying Buddhist temples. Will that concoction not

distance Buddhists from Hindus? Will that narrative, specially when it does not have the slightest basis in fact, not embitter Hindus?

Swamiji focussed on another factor about which we hear little today: internal decay. The Buddha – like Gandhiji in our times – taught us first and last to alter our conduct, to realise through practice the insights he had attained. But that is the last thing the people want to do, they want soporifics: a few words to chant, a pilgrimage, an idol which may deliver them from the consequences of what they have done. The people walked out on the Buddha's austere teaching – for it sternly ruled out props. No external suppression etc., were needed to wean them away: people are deserting Gandhiji for the same reason today – is any violence or conspiracy at work?

The religion became monk-, and monastery-centric. And these decayed as closed groups and institutions invariably do. Ambedkar himself alludes to this factor – though he puts even this aspect of the decay to the ravages of Islam. After the decimation of monks by Muslim invaders, all sorts of persons – married clergy, artisan priests – had to be roped in to take their place. Hence the inevitable result, Ambedkar writes: "It is obvious that this new Buddhist priesthood had neither dignity nor learning and were a poor match for the rival, the Brahmins whose cunning was not unequal to their learning."

Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and others who had reflected deeply on the course of the religious evolution of our people, focussed on the condition to which Buddhist monasteries had been reduced by themselves. The people had already departed from the pristine teaching of the Buddha, Swamiji pointed out: the Buddha had taught no God, no Ruler of the Universe, but the people, being ignorant and in need of sedatives, "brought their gods, and devils, and hobgoblins out again, and a tremendous hotchpotch was made of Buddhism in India." Buddhism itself took on

these characters: and the growth that we ascribe to the marvelous personality of the Buddha and to the excellence of his teaching, Swami Vivekananda said, was due in fact "to the temples which were built, the idols that were erected, and the gorgeous ceremonials that were put before the nation."[5] Soon the "wonderful moral strength" of the original message was lost "and what remained of it became full of superstitions and ceremonials, a hundred times cruder than those it intended to suppress," of practices which were "equally bad, unclean, and immoral...."

Swami Vivekananda regarded the Buddha as "the living embodiment of Vedanta". He always spoke of the Buddha in superlatives. For that very reason, Swami Vivekananda raged all the more at what Buddhism became: "It became a mass of corruption of which I cannot speak before this audience....;" "I have neither the time nor the inclination to describe to you the hideousness that came in the wake of Buddhism. The most hideous ceremonies, the most horrible, the most obscene books that human hands ever wrote or the human brain ever conceived, the most bestial forms that ever passed under the name of religion, have all been the creation of degraded Buddhism"....[6]

With reform as his life's mission, Swami Vivekananda reflected deeply on the flaws which enfeebled Buddhism, and his insights hold lessons for us to this day. Every reform movement, he said, necessarily stresses negative elements. But if it goes on stressing only the negative, it soon peters out. After the Buddha, his followers kept emphasising the negative, when the people wanted the positive that would help lift them.

"Every movement triumphs," he wrote, "by dint of some unusual characteristic, and when it falls, that point of pride

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[5]Swami Vivekananda, *Collected Works*, for instance, Volume II, p. 139; Volume III, pp. 216-17.

[6]*Collected Works*, for instance, Volume III, p. 265.

becomes its chief element of weakness." And in the case of Buddhism, he said, it was the monastic order. This gave it an organisational impetus, but soon consequences of the opposite kind took over. Instituting the monastic order, he said, had "the evil effect of making the very robe of the monk honoured," instead of making reverence contingent on conduct. "Then these monasteries became rich," he recalled, "the real cause of the downfall is here.... some containing a hundred thousand monks, sometimes twenty thousand monks in one building – huge, gigantic buildings...." On the one hand this fomented corruption within, it encoiled the movement in organisational problems. On the other it drained society of the best persons.[7]

From its very inception, the monastic order had institutionalised inequality of men and women even in *sanyasa,* Swami Vivekananda pointed out. "Then gradually," he recalled, "the corruption known as *Vamachara* (unrestrained mixing with women in the name of religion) crept in and ruined Buddhism. Such diabolical rites are not to be met with in any modern Tantra...."[8]

Whereas the Buddha had counseled that we shun metaphysical speculations and philosophical conundrums – as these would only pull us away from practice – Buddhist monks and scholars lost themselves in arcane debates about these very questions.[9] The consequence was immediate:

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[7]*Collected Works,* for instance, Volume III, pp. 533-34; Volume V, p. 230.

[8]*Collected Works,* for instance, Volume IV, p. 326; Volume V, p. 317; Volume VI, pp. 224-25; Volume VII, pp. 119, 215-16.

[9]Hence a truth in Kosambi's observation, but in the sense opposite to the one he intended : Shankara's refutations show that Shankara knew nothing of Buddha's original doctrine, Kosambi asserted [Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 14]; Shankara was refuting the doctrines which were being put forth by the Buddhists in his time. And *these* had nothing to do with the original teaching of the Buddha.

"By becoming too philosophic," Swami Vivekananda explained, "they lost much of their breadth of heart."

Sri Aurobindo alludes to another factor, an inherent incompatibility. He writes of "the exclusive trenchancy of its [Buddhism's] intellectual, ethical and spiritual positions," and of how "its trenchant affirmations and still more exclusive negations could not be made sufficiently compatible with the native flexibility, many-sided susceptibility and rich synthetic turn of the Indian religious consciousness; it was a high creed but not plastic enough to hold the heart of the people...."[10]

We find in such factors a complete explanation for the evaporation of Buddhism. But we will find few of them in the secularist discourse today. Because their purpose is served by one "thesis" alone: Hindus crushed Buddhists, Hindus demolished their temples....

In regard to matter after critical matter – the Aryan-Dravidian divide, the nature of Islamic invasions, the nature of Islamic rule, the character of the Freedom Struggle – we find this trait – *suppresso veri, suggesto falsi. This* is the real scandal of history-writing in the last thirty years. And it has been possible for these "eminent historians" to perpetrate it because they acquired control of institutions like the ICHR. To undo the falsehood, the control has to be undone.

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[10]Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1968, pp. 75, 160-61, 192-93.

The policy of "broad toleration" !

"Despite the pressure of a section of the orthodox theologians," the eminent historian Satish Chandra assures the Class XI student, "this policy of broad toleration was maintained during the Sultanate." Really?

What policy do we find narrated in the accounts of Islamic historians of the time, in the accounts, that is, of the very authorities on whose books our distinguished historians would have to construct their "theses"? What events do they celebrate? What do those Islamic authorities say were the motives which impelled the rulers of the time?

Fortunately, the intrepid Sita Ram Goel has set out four hundred pages of extracts and evidence from the leading Islamic historians of those days in his decisive work, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them, The Islamic Evidence,* Volume II.[1] Even a small sample from that mountain of evidence will be sufficient to indicate how much it is that our eminent historians conceal.

Sultan Jalalu'd-Din Khalji (1290-1296): *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* of Ziau'd-Din Barani (born 1285-86):

Jhain (Rajasthan): "In the year AH 689 (AD 1290), the Sultan led an army to Rantambhor.... He took.... Jhain, destroyed the

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[1]Voice of India, Delhi, 1993. All citations in this chapter are taken with his permission from Goel's meticulous and unimpeachable study.

idol temples, and broke and burned the idols...."

Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh):"'Alau'd-din at this time held the territory of Karra, and with the permission of the Sultan he marched to Bhailsan (Bhilsa). He captured some bronze idols which the Hindus worshipped and sent them on carts with a variety of rich booty as presents to the Sultan. The idols were laid before the Badaun gate for true believers to tread upon...." (Report to the same effect in Nizamu'd-Din Ahmad bin Muhammad Muqim al-Harbi, *Tabqat-i-Akbari.*)

Sultan Alau'd-Din Khalji (1296-1316), in *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi, op. cit.*:

Somnath (Gujarat): "At the beginning of the third year of the reign, Ulugh Khan and Nusrat Khan, with their amirs and generals, and a large army marched against Gujarat.... All Gujarat became a prey to the invaders, and the idol, which after the victory of Sultan Mahmud and his destruction of (the idol) of Manat, the Brahmans had set up under the name of Somanat, for the worship of the Hindus, was carried to Delhi where it was laid for the people to tread upon...." (Report to the same effect in *Tabqat-i-Akbari, op. cit.*, and Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni's *Muntakhabu't-Tawarikh;* the latter also mentions that at the site of the temple a mosque was constructed.)

Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1351-1388): *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* of Shamsu'd-Din bin Siraju'd-Din, a courtier of Firuz Shah:

Puri (Orissa): "After the hunt was over, the Sultan directed his attention to the Rai of Jajnagar, and entering the palace where he dwelt he found many fine buildings. It is reported that inside the Rai's fort, there was a stone idol which the infidels called Jagannath, and to which they paid their devotions. Sultan Firoz, in emulation of Mahmud Subuktigin, having rooted up the idol, carried it away to Delhi where he placed it in an ignominious position...."

Jajnagar (Orissa): "The victorious standards set out from Jaunpur for the destruction of idols, slaughter of the enemies

of Islam and hunt for elephants near Padamtalav.... The Sultan saw Jajnagar which had been praised by all travelers.... The troops which had been appointed for the destruction of places around Jajnagar, ended the conceit of the infidels by means of the sword and the spear. Wherever there were temples and idols in that area, they were trampled under the hoofs of the horses of Musalmans.... After obtaining victory and sailing on the sea and destroying the temple of Jagannath and slaughtering the idolaters, the victorious standards started towards Delhi...."

This achievement in the service of Islam is also narrated in *Sirat-Firuz Shahi* as follows:

"Allah, who is the only true God and has no other emanation, endowed the king of Islam with the strength to destroy this ancient shrine on the eastern sea-coast and to plunge it into the sea, and after its destruction, he ordered the nose of the image of Jagannath to be perforated and disgraced it by casting it down on the ground. They dug out other idols, which were worshipped by the polytheists in the kingdom of Jajnagar, and overthrew them as they did the image of Jagannath, for being laid in front of the mosques along the path of the Sunnis and way of the *musallis* (the multitude who offer prayers) and stretched them in front of the portals of every mosque, so that the body and sides of the images may be trampled at the time of ascent and descent, entrance and exit, by the shoes on the feet of the Muslims."

In *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi* written by Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq himself, he records how he decreed that the names and titles of "those sovereigns of Islam under whose happy fortune and favour infidel countries had been conquered, whose banners had waved over many a land, under whom idol-temples had been demolished, and mosques and pulpits built and exalted" should be recited in the *khutba*, and prayers offered for the remission of their sins.

On the steps he took for erasing idolatry in Delhi and its surroundings, Sultan Firuz Shah records,

"The Hindus and idol-worshippers had agreed to pay the money for toleration *(zar-i-zimmiya)* and had consented to the poll-tax (*jizya*) in return for which they and their families enjoyed security. These people now erected new idol-temples in the city and the environs in opposition to the Law of the Prophet which declared that such temples are not to be tolerated. Under divine guidance I destroyed these edifices and I killed those leaders of infidelity who seduced others into error, and the lower orders I subjected to stripes and chastisement, until this abuse was entirely abolished. The following is an instance: In the village of Maluh there is a tank which they call *kund* (tank). Here they had built idol-temples and on certain days the Hindus were accustomed to proceed thither on horseback, and wearing arms. Their women and children also went out in palankins and carts. There they assembled in thousands and performed idol-worship.... When intelligence of this came to my ears my religious feelings prompted me at once to put a stop to this scandal and offence to the religion of Islam. On the day of the assembly I went there in person and I ordered that the leaders of these people and the promoters of this abomination should be put to death. I forbade the infliction of any severe punishments on Hindus in general, but I destroyed their idol-temples, and instead thereof raised mosques. I founded two flourishing towns (*kasba*), one called Tughlikpur, the other Salarpur. Where infidels and idolaters worshipped idols, Musulmans now, by God's mercy, perform their devotions to the true God. Praises of God and the summons to prayer are now heard there, and that place which was formerly the home of the infidels has become the habitation of the faithful, who there repeat their creed and offer up their praises to God.... Information was brought to me that some Hindus had erected a new idol temple in the village of Salihpur, and were performing worship to their idols. I sent some persons there to destroy the idol temple, and put a stop to their pernicious incitements to error."

And about neighbouring Gohana, Firuz Shah narrates,

Gohana (Haryana): "Some Hindus had erected a new idol-temple in the village of Kohana, and the idolaters used to

assemble there and perform their idolatrous rites. These people were seized and brought before me. I ordered that the perverse conduct of the leaders of this wickedness should be publicly proclaimed, and that they should be put to death before the gate of the palace. I also ordered that the infidel books, the idols, and the vessels used in their worship, which had been taken with them, should all be publicly burnt. The others were restrained by threats and punishments, as a warning to all men, that no *zimmi* could follow such wicked practices in a Musulman country."

In his *Tarikh-i-Firishta,* Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Firishta gives an account of *Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq* at Nagarkot, Kangra in Himachal Pradesh:

"…. From thence the King marched towards the mountains of Nagarkot, where he was overtaken by a storm of hail and snow. The Raja of Nagarkot, after sustaining some loss, submitted, but was restored to his dominions. The name of Nagarkot was, on this occasion, changed to that of Mahomedabad, in honour of the late king…. Some historians state, that Feroze, on this occasion, broke the idols of Nagarkot, and mixing the fragments with pieces of cow's flesh, filled bags with them, and caused them to be tied round the necks of Brahmans, who were then paraded through the camp. It is said, also, that he sent the image of Nowshaba to Mecca, to be thrown on the road, that it might be trodden under foot by the pilgrims, and that he also remitted the sum of 100,000 *tunkas*, to be distributed among the devotees and servants of the temple."

Do the accounts leave any doubt about the motivation which spurred these Sultans? Do these glowing and triumphant accounts leave any ground for maintaining that the Sultans of Delhi followed a policy of "broad toleration"?

Sultan Shamsu'd-Din Altutmish (1210-1236) in *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* of Yahya bin Ahmad bin Abdu'llah Sirhindi:

"….Next he turned towards Ujjain and conquered it, and after demolishing the idol-temple of Mahakal, he uprooted the

statue of Bikramajit together with all other statues and images which were placed on pedestals, and brought them to the capital where they were laid before the Jami' Masjid for being trodden under foot by the people." (Reports to the same effect in *Tabqat-i-Akbari, op. cit.*, in *Muntakhabu't-Tawarikh, op. cit.*, and in *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi, op. cit.*)

Sultan Nasiru'd-Din Mahmud Shah Tughlaq (1389-1412) in *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi* of Muhammad Bihamad Khani:

> "Historians have recorded that in the auspicious year AH 792 (AD 1389-90) Sultan Nasiru'd-Din got founded a city named Muhammadabad, after the name of Prophet Muhammad, at a place known as Kalpi which was a home of the accursed infidels, and he got mosques raised in place of temples for the worship of Allah. He got palaces, tombs and schools constructed, and ended the wicked ways of the infidels, and promoted the *Shariat* of Prophet Muhammad...."

Sultan Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) in Ahmad Yadgar's *Tarikh-i-Shahi*:

> "Sultan Sikandar led a very pious life.... Islam was regarded very highly in his reign. The infidels could not muster the courage to worship idols or bathe in the (sacred) streams. During his holy reign, idols were hidden underground. The stone (idol) of Nagarkot, which had misled the (whole) world, was brought and handed over to butchers so that they might weigh meat with it."

Shykh Rizqu'llah Mushtaqi's *Waqiat-i-Mushtaqi* carries a report to the same effect. It also records the following regarding Sikandar Lodi's pious deeds at *Mathura*:

> "He got the temples of the infidels destroyed. No trace of infidelity was left at the place in Mathura where the infidels used to take bath. He got caravansarais constructed so that people could stay there, and also the shops of various professionals such as the butchers, *bawarchis*, *nanbais* and

sweetmeatsellers. If a Hindu went there for bathing even by mistake, he was made to lose his limbs and punished severely. No Hindu could get shaved at that place. No barber would go near a Hindu, whatever be the payment offered...."

In *Tabqat-i-Akbari, op. cit.* we have Sultan Sikander Lodi at *Mandrail* (Madhya Pradesh):

"Thereafter he himself laid siege to the fort of Mandrail. Those inside the fort surrendered the fort to him after signing a treaty. The Sultan got the temples demolished and mosques erected in their stead.... and then after the rainy season was over, he led an expedition towards the fort of Udit Nagar in AH 912 (AD 1506-07).... Although those inside the fort tried their utmost to seek a pardon, he did not listen to them, and the fort was breached at many points and conquered.... The Sultan thanked Allah in the wake of his victory.... He got the temples demolished and mosques constructed in their stead...."

In Abu'llah's *Tarikh-i-Da'udi:* Sultan Sikandar Lodi at *Mathura* (Uttar Pradesh):

"He was so zealous a Musalman that he utterly destroyed diverse places of worship of the infidels, and left not a vestige remaining of them. He entirely ruined the shrines of Mathura, the mine of heathenism, and turned other principal Hindu places of worship into caravansarais and colleges. Their stone images were given to the butchers to serve them as meat-weight, and all the Hindus in Mathura were strictly prohibited from shaving their heads and beards, and performing their ablutions...."

And then at *Dholpur (Madhya Pradesh)*:

"In that year the Sultan sent Khawas Khan to take possession of the fort of Dhulpur. The Raja of that place advanced to give battle, and daily fighting took place. The instant His Majesty heard of the firm countenance shown by the *rai* of Dhulpur in opposing the royal army, he went there in person; but on his arrival near Dhulpur, the *rai* made up his mind to fly without

fighting.... He (Sikandar) offered up suitable thanksgiving for his success, and the royal troops spoiled and plundered in all directions, rooting up all the trees of the gardens which shaded Dhulpur to the distance of seven *kos*. Sultan Sikandar stayed there during one month, erected a mosque on the site of an idol-temple, and then set off towards Agra...."

Sultan Mahmud bin Ibrahim Sharqi (AD 1440-1457): in *Tabqat-i-Akbari, op. cit.*:

"After some time he proceeded to Orissa with the intention of *jihad*. He attacked places in the neighbourhood of that province and laid them waste, and destroyed the temples after demolishing them...."

Sultan Mahmud Khalji of Malwa (AD 1436-1469): in *Tabqat-i-Akbari, op. cit.*:

Chittaurgarh (Rajasthan): After he had crossed the river Bhim, he started laying waste the country and capturing its people by sending expeditions towards Chittor every day. He started constructing mosques after demolishing temples. He stayed 2-3 days at every halt."

Jalalu'd-Din Muhammad Akbar Padshah Ghazi (AD 1556-1605) in *Muntakhabu't-Tawarikh, op. cit.*:

"The temple of Nagarkot, which is outside the city, was taken at the very outset.... On this occasion many mountaineers became food for the flashing sword. And that golden umbrella, which was erected on the top of the cupola of the temple, they riddled with arrows.... And black cows, to the number of 200, to which they pay boundless respect, and actually worship, and present to the temple, which they look upon as an asylum, and let loose there, were killed by the Musulmans. And, while arrows and bullets were continually falling like drops of rain, through their zeal and intense hatred of idolatry they filled their shoes full of blood and threw it on the doors and walls of the temple...."

And the same sequence was being enacted in the South.

Sultan Alau'd-Din Mujahid Shah Bahmani (AD 1375-1378): the account in *Tarikh-i-Firishta, op. cit.:*

> *Vijayanagar (Karnataka)*: "Mujahid Shah, on this occasion, repaired mosques which had been built by the officers of Alla-ood-Deen Khiljy. He broke down many temples of the idolaters, and laid waste the country; after which he hastened to Beejanuggur.... The King drove them before him, and gained the bank of a piece of water, which alone divided him from the citadel, wherein the *Ray* resided. Near this spot was an eminence, on which stood a temple, covered with plates of gold and silver, set with jewels: it was much venerated by the Hindoos, and called, in the language of the country, Puttuk. The King, considering its destruction a religious obligation ascended the hill, and having razed the edifice, became possessed of the precious metals and jewels therein...."

Sultan Ahmad Shah I Wali Bahmani (AD 1422-1435): in *Tarikh-i-Firishta, op. cit.:*

> *Vijayanagar (Karnataka)*: "Ahmud Shah, without waiting to besiege the Hindoo capital, overran the open country; and wherever he went put to death men, women, and children, without mercy, contrary to the compact made between his uncle and predecessor, Mahomed Shah, and the *Rays* of Beejanuggur. Whenever the number of slain amounted to twenty thousand, he halted three days, and made a festival celebration of the bloody event. He broke down, also, the idolatrous temples, and destroyed the colleges of the brahmins. During these operations, a body of five thousand Hindoos, urged by desperation at the destruction of their religious buildings, and at the insults offered to their deities, united in taking an oath to sacrifice their lives in an attempt to kill the King, as the author of all their sufferings...."

Sultan Muhammad Shah II Bahmani (AD 1463-1482): in *Tarikh-i-Firishta, op. cit.:*

Komdapalli (Andhra Pradesh): "The King having gone to view the fort, broke down an idolatrous temple, and killed some brahmins, who officiated at it, with his own hands, as a point of religion. He then gave orders for a mosque to be erected on the foundation of the temple, and ascending a pulpit, repeated a few prayers, distributed alms, and commanded the *Khootba* to be read in his name. Khwaja Mahmood Gawan now represented, that as his Majesty had slain some infidels with his own hands, he might fairly assume the title of *Ghazy*, an appellation of which he was very proud. Mahmood Shah was the first of his race who had slain a brahmin...."

And so on – among the highest piles of rubble in the world of the sacred temples of another religion, among the highest piles of corpses of those venerated by another religion. Yet, in the reckoning of our eminent historians a policy of "Broad Toleration" ! A policy of toleration guided by purely secular motivations !

Having presented voluminous evidence about the destruction of temples, Sita Ram Goel remarks:

> "Starting with Al-Biladhuri who wrote in Arabic in the second half of the ninth century, and coming down to Syed Mahmudul Hasan who wrote in English in the fourth decade of the twentieth, we have cited from *eighty* histories spanning a period of more than *twelve hundred years*. Our citations mention *sixty-one* kings, *sixty-three* military commanders and *fourteen* Sufis who destroyed Hindu temples in *one hundred and fifty-four* localities, big and small, spread from Khurasan in the West to Tripura in the East, and from Transoxiana in the North to Tamil Nadu in the South, over a period of *eleven hundred years*. In most cases the destruction of temples was followed by erection of mosques, *madrasas and khanqahs*, etc., on the temple sites and, frequently, with temple materials. Allah was thanked every time for enabling the iconoclast concerned to render service to the religion of Muhammad by means of this pious performance."[2]

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[2]Sita Ram Goel, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

And the destructions were not because of a lust for plunder or a determination to impose political hegemony alone. Their impulse was religious – that is, to carry out the Command of Allah and to follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Goel correctly observes:

"The destruction of Hindu temples at the hands of Islamised invaders continued for more than eleven hundred years, from the middle of the seventh century to the end of the eighteenth. It took place all over the cradle of Hindu culture, from Sinkiang in the North to Tamil Nadu in the South, and from Seistan in the West to Assam in the East.

"All along, the iconoclasts remained convinced that they were putting into practice the highest tenets of their religion. They also saw to it that a record was kept of what they prized as a pious performance. The language of the record speaks for itself. It leaves no doubt that they took immense pride in doing what they did.

"It is inconceivable that a constant and consistent behaviour pattern, witnessed for a long time and over a vast area, can be explained except in terms of a settled system of belief which leaves no scope for second thoughts. Looking at the very large number of temples, big and small, destroyed or desecrated or converted into Muslim monuments, economic or political explanations can be only a futile, if not fraudulent, exercise. The explanations are not even plausible."[3]

In an entire chapter – Chapter 16 of his book – Goel recalls instances after instances set out with great pride by the biographers of the Prophet, describing the destruction of temples by the Prophet himself. What the Prophet did, is by definition the *Sunnah* – along with Quran, it is one of the two principal sources in accordance with which every believer must order his conduct. Sita Ram Goel's conclusion is unassailable. He writes:

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 255.

"Thus the practice of the Prophet or his *Sunnah* vis-a-vis idols and idol-temples was added to prescriptions of the Quran in this respect, and the Islamic theology of iconoclasm stood completed. Ever since, iconoclasm has been a prominent as well a permanent part of the theology of Islam.

"Allah had denounced the idols and their worship as abominable. His Prophet got the idols broken or burnt, and their temples destroyed.

"The Prophet added a few nuances on his own. He got the sites and materials of pagan temples used in the construction of mosques that replaced them. In many cases, idols were placed on the footsteps of the mosques so that the faithful could trample upon them while entering and coming out of Allah's abodes. These acts, too, became pious precedents and were followed by Islamic invaders wherever they came across idols."[4]

In a word, what was done was no fortuitous "error". Allah had decreed that the houses of worship of other religions be destroyed. The Prophet had carried out the command at every occasion on which it had been necessary and prudent to do so. And what the Prophet did is the *Sunnah*, which, alongwith the Quran, is the model on which believers are to order their conduct. That is what these rulers, invaders, and "saints" did. That is what they and their historians said they were doing.

And that is precisely what our eminent historians conceal.

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 371.

The litmus test

The same pattern continues throughout the textbook, *Medieval India* written by one of the more eminent among these historians, Satish Chandra, and published by the NCERT for Class XI students. "Thus, there was no atmosphere of confrontation between the Sikhs and the Mughal rulers during this period," says Satish Chandra. "Nor was there any systematic persecution of the Hindus, and hence, no occasion for the Sikhs or any group or sect to stand forth as the champion of the Hindus against religious persecution. The occasional conflict between the Gurus and the Mughal rulers was personal and political rather than religious. Despite some display of orthodoxy by Shah Jahan at the beginning of his reign and a few acts of intolerance, such as the demolition of 'new' temples, he was not narrow in his outlook which was further tempered towards the end of his reign by the influence of his liberal son, Dara."[1]

That being the case, what do these eminent historians have to say about what is enshrined in the *Granth Sahib*, about Guru Nanak, and his searing cry,

Khurasan khasmana kiya Hindustanu daraiya

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[1]Satish Chandra, *Medieval India,* National Council of Educational Research and Training, Delhi, 1996, p. 223.

Aapae dosu na deyi karta jamu kari mughlu chadhaiya
Aiti maar payi karlande tain ko dardu na ayiya
Karta tu sabhna ka soi
Je sakta sakte kayu mare taa mani rosu na hoyi
Sakta sihu maare paye vagaye khasme sa pursai
Ratan vigadi vigoye kuttin muiya saar na koyi....[Mahla 1.360]

Having lifted Islam to the head, You have engulfed Hindustan in dread.... Such cruelties have they inflicted, and yet Your mercy remains unmoved.... Should the strong attack the strong, the heart does not burn. But when the strong crush the helpless, surely the One who was to protect them has to be called to account.... O' Lord, these dogs have destroyed this diamond-like Hindustan, (so great is their terror that) no one asks after those who have been killed, and yet You do not pay heed....

What do they say of Guru Nanak's account of the young brides whose youth, jewels, honour have been snatched away by the invaders on the orders of Babar? What of his wail,

Ikna vakhat khuvai ahi iknaha pooja jayi
Chauke vinu hindvandiyan kiyu tike kadhayi nayi
Ramu na kabhu chetiyo huni kahni na mile khudai....
[Mahla 1.417]

Hindus have been forbidden to pray at the time of the Muslim's *namaz*, Hindu society has been left without a bath, without a *tilak*. Even those who have never uttered "Ram", even they can get no respite, not even by shouting *"Khuda, Khuda"*.... The few who have survived Babar's jails wail.... The desolation which has come over the land.... The entire races which have been exterminated, which have been humiliated....[2]

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[2]The passages are merely illustrative, they can be multiplied many times over. For a comprehensive treatment of the subject see K. P. Agarwal, *Guru Granth Sahib aur Islam*, forthcoming.

The account not of some merely eminent historian, but of Guru Nanak. Not some account written by looking at records of centuries ago, but testimony of the moment, of what Guru Nanak had been witness to himself....

Let us hear these eminent secularists, then, declare that this cry of Guru Nanak was a concoction. And that the entire life and campaign of Guru Govind Singh was born of "personal and political" factors rather than from a profound religious impulse, and that, therefore, all his own explanations, his impassioned, soul-stirring explanations in this regard are that much deception.

Akbar is the epitome of tolerance, Shah Jahan "despite some display of orthodoxy .... at the beginning of his reign and a few acts of intolerance" remains broad-minded.[3] The only opposition to this liberalism comes from "orthodox elements". But here too Satish Chandra executes the "balancing". The orthodox elements in question are always of "the two leading faiths, Hinduism or Islam," together ![4] Both sides strive to undo the liberality of the Islamic rulers out of the same mundane motivation – that is, they oppose the liberal policy because it threatens their entrenched interests.

Aurangzeb's orthodoxy cannot, of course, be entirely denied. Therefore, explanations upon explanations – secular explanations ! – are invented. "Later, in the eleventh year of his reign (1669)," remarks Satish Chandra, "Aurangzeb took a number of measures which have been called puritanical, but many of which were really of economic and social character, and against superstitious beliefs .... Many other regulations of a similar nature, some of a moral character and some to instill a sense of austerity, were issued...."[5]

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[3]Satish Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
[4]*Ibid.*, p. 223. [5]*Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

The destruction of temples upon temples by Aurangzeb naturally comes in for the longest explanations ! Firstly, we are told that all that Aurangzeb did was to reiterate the old order of the *Shariat* – that no new temples shall be built, and that this "order regarding temples was not a new one" – it merely reaffirmed the position which had existed during the Sultanate period, the period, remember, of "broad toleration" ! Satish Chandra adds a second explanation: "In practice, it [the order] left wide latitude to the local officials as to the interpretation of the words 'long standing temples'."[6]

A third extenuating circumstance is then invented. Having noted the destruction of temples in Gujarat by Aurangzeb when he was the Governor of that province, and having noted his reiteration of the Standing Order under the *Shariat*, Satish Chandra says, "however, it does not seem that Aurangzeb's order regarding ban on new temples led to a large scale destruction of temples at the outset of the reign." It is only when Aurangzeb "encountered political opposition from a number of quarters, such as the Marathas, Jats etc.," that he "seems to have adopted a new stance". When he now came in "conflict with local elements," he began to consider it "legitimate to destroy even long standing Hindu temples as a measure of punishment and as a warning."[7] Thus, first, the order was just an old one ! Second, the order left wide latitude to the local officials ! Third, even this order was not implemented "at the outset of the reign" ! Fourth, it is only when he encountered political opposition and when he came in conflict with local elements that Aurangzeb began to consider it legitimate to destroy Hindu temples ! Fifth, this "new stance" – a mere stance – too is only something which *seems to have been adopted !*

Moreover, Aurangzeb did so, Satish Chandra tells us,

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[6]*Ibid.*, p. 230. [7]*Ibid.*, p. 231.

because "he began to look upon temples as centres of spreading subversive ideas, that is ideas which were not acceptable to the orthodox elements. Hence the destruction of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple at Banaras and the temple at Mathura." "The destruction of these temples had a political motivation as well ....," Satish Chandra emphasises, and continues, "it was in this context that many temples built in Orissa during the last 10 to 12 years were also destroyed." And then, "but it is wrong to think that there were any orders for the general destruction of temples." Lest anyone come up with citations from contemporary historians, another sentence to explain away what was actually done: "however, the situation was different during periods of hostilities."[8]

The general conclusion: what Aurangzeb did "was a setback to the policy of broad toleration followed by his predecessors" ![9] And even he did it for secular reasons ! And even though compelled by these reasons, he did it only for the shortest time, for the years marked by hostilities instigated by "local elements" ! And, finally, concludes Satish Chandra, "it seems that Aurangzeb's zeal for the destruction of temples abated after 1679, for we do not hear of any large scale destruction of temples in the South between 1681 and his death in 1707."[10]

Yes, Aurangzeb introduced the *jaziya*, but, cautions Satish Chandra, "it was not meant to be an economic pressure for forcing Hindus to convert to Islam, for its incidence was to be light." For this assertion Satish Chandra gives two bits of proof, so to say. First, "women, children, the disabled, the indigent, that is, those whose income was less than the means of subsistence, were exempted as were those in government service."[11] How could even Aurangzeb have exacted a tax from those "whose income was less than the

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[8]*Ibid.*, p. 231. [9]*Ibid.*, p. 231. [10]*Ibid.*, p. 231. [11]*Ibid.*, p. 232.

means of subsistence?" And why would he exact a discriminatory and humiliating tax from those who were in government service, that is, from those who were already serving his interests and those of the Islamic State? ! The second proof that Satish Chandra gives is that "in fact, only an insignificant section of Hindus changed their religion due to this tax"[12] – but could that not have been because of the firm attachment of Hindus to their faith, because of their tenacity rather than because of the liberality of Aurangzeb?

The *jaziya* was not meant either to meet "a difficult financial situation". Its reimposition was in fact, says Satish Chandra, "both political and ideological in nature." Political in the sense that "it was meant to rally the Muslims for the defence of the State against the Marathas and the Rajputs who were up in arms, and possibly against the Muslim States of Deccan, especially Golconda, which was in alliance with the infidels."[13] A parity twice-over – one, that Aurangzeb was only trying to rally the Muslims just as those opposing him had rallied the Marathas and Rajputs ! And, in any case, the ones who were opposing him were "infidels" !

And what about the "ideological" impulse? "Ideological," yes, but the "ideology" was everything except Islam !

Furthermore, Satish Chandra explains, "*jaziya* was to be collected by honest, God-fearing Muslims who were specially appointed for the purpose and its proceeds were reserved for the *Ulama*."[14] As the proceeds went to *Ulama*, there was a secular reason for exacting the tax – it was to be "a type of bribe for the theologians among whom there was a lot of unemployment," and, second, as the tax was being collected by "honest, God-fearing Muslims," one can be certain that they were considerate and, like Allah in the

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 232. [13] *Ibid.*, p. 232. [14] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

Quran, would have never imposed upon anyone a burden which he could not bear !

Some modern writers, Satish Chandra says, are of the opinion that Aurangzeb's measures were designed to convert India into *Dar-ul-Islam* but, in fact, "although Aurangzeb considered it legitimate to encourage conversions to Islam, evidence of systematic or large scale attempts at forced conversions is lacking."[15]

And finally a piece of evidence which is a favourite with the secularists – recall Shrimali in the TV programme: "Nor were Hindu nobles discriminated against. A recent study has shown that the number of Hindus in the nobility during the second half of Aurangzeb's reign had steadily increased, till the Hindus, including Muslims, formed about one-third of the nobility as against one-fourth under Shah Jahan."[16] Correspondingly, one can claim on behalf of the British Empire that close to 98% of the titles it conferred – Rai Sahib, Rai Bahadur, Knighthoods and so on – were conferred on Indians ! That they were conferred because these Indians were serving the British Empire faithfully, just as Aurangzeb was taking into his nobility those who were serving his purposes faithfully, is a matter of detail by which naturally Class XI students would not like to be confused !

The final assessment of our secularist eminence could not be more empathetic ! First, Satish Chandra emphasises that "Aurangzeb's religious beliefs could not be considered the basis of his political policies." Aurangzeb was an "orthodox Muslim," true; he was "desirous of upholding the strict letter of the law," true; but he was also a ruler and was "keen to strengthen and expand the empire." The former required that he be tough with the Hindus. The latter, on the other hand, required that he retain "the support of the Hindus to the extent possible." The two impulses –

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[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 232-33. [16] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

his religious ideas and beliefs on the one hand and the requirements of empire on the other – sometimes "led him to adopt contradictory policies which harmed the empire."[17]

Our eminent historian then proceeds to give an account of the Marathas, the Jats, the campaigns against Golconda and Bijapur. At every turn he labours to show that the religious impulse did not have much to do with Aurangzeb's attitude towards any of these "rebellions". Indeed, Aurangzeb's religious policy must be seen in the context of the rebellions which were challenging his empire, we are told ! Thus, Satish Chandra's final conclusion:

> "Aurangzeb's religious policy should be seen in the social, economic and political context. Aurangzeb was orthodox in his outlook and tried to remain within the framework of the Islamic law. But this law was developed outside India in vastly dissimilar situations, and could hardly be applied rigidly to India. His failure to respect the susceptibilities of his non-Muslim subjects on many occasions, his adherence to the time-worn policy towards temples and re-imposition of *jizyah* as laid down by the Islamic law did not help him to rally the Muslims to his side or generate a greater sense of loyalty towards a state based on Islamic law. On the other hand, it alienated segments of the Hindus and strengthened the hands of those sections which were opposed to the Mughal empire for political or other reasons. By itself, religion was not a point at issue. *Jizyah* was scrapped within half a dozen years of Aurangzeb's death and restrictions on building new temples eased."[18]

"In the ultimate resort," Satish Chandra concludes, "the decline and downfall of the empire was due to economic, social, political and institutional factors" – notice, no religious factors ! Akbar held the forces of disintegration in check for some time. But it was impossible for him to effect fundamental changes in the structure of society, says our

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[17]*Ibid.*, p. 233. [18]*Ibid.*, p. 255.

author, and therefore:

> "By the time Aurangzeb came to the throne, the socio-economic forces of disintegration were already strong. Aurangzeb lacked the foresight and statesmanship necessary to effect fundamental changes in the structure or to pursue policies which could, for the time being, reconcile the various competing elements.
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> "Thus, Aurangzeb was both a victim of circumstances, and helped to create the circumstances of which he became a victim."[19]

Empathy personified !

The first thing that strikes one, of course, is the double standard. We shall soon see how, with next to no evidence, our eminent historians pressed the most far-reaching assertions about ancient India – about its having been a period riddled with tensions, inequity and oppression. And how, in cases such as Aurangzeb and the Sultanate, these very historians shut their eyes to what stares them in the face. In a word, their histories are set to a formula: pre-Islamic India must be presented as a land of discord, a land in the grip of a social and political system marked by injustice, extreme inequities and oppression – evidence or no evidence; and the Islamic period must be presented – evidence or no evidence – as a period in which "the composite culture" flowered, a period in which the policy of "broad toleration" was the norm, and such departures from it as took place were just the aberrations of individuals, aberrations which themselves can be tracked down to wholly secular causes.

The second point which strikes one is reach, and consistency! Recall the deletions which the West Bengal Secondary Board had decreed in regard to Aurangzeb, and

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 255.

the portrait that it had ensured would reach the students: a ruler who banned music etc. out of ordinary, secular aversion; who, when he moved against others, did so for the eminently understandable and wholly secular reason – that of protecting his Empire. Recall that the Board had ensured that any mention of his policy towards Hindus would be accompanied by a reminder – that this was an exception to the general rule, in particular to Akbar's policies of religious tolerance and equal treatment. How faithfully our eminent historian in Delhi has followed the guidelines issued for elementary textbooks in Bengal!

The third thing that strikes one in these accounts and explanations is how closely they parrot the volumes of a person like Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi; as is well known, Qureshi taught History at the Delhi University and then migrated to Pakistan. There he became one of the early and ardent proponents of Islamisation: he is credited with, he credited himself with having been one of the principal drafters of the "Objectives Resolution" which was passed by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly in 1949, and became the fount of Islamisation; he became a Minister in the Government of Liaqat Ali Khan and later the President of the Pakistan Historical Society. He was eventually decorated with the high honour, *Sitara-i-Pakistan*.

In his volume *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Qureshi remarks about the reimposition of *jizyah* by Aurangzeb as follows:

"When Alamgir I reimposed *jizyah* after a lapse of 115 years, no sudden spurt in the number of conversions is recorded. Without the availability of statistics a definite conclusion is difficult to reach; but even in the epistles of such an ardent advocate of the reimposition of *jizyah* as the Mujaddid-i-alf-i-Thani, the argument that the abolition of *jizyah* had in any way affected the propagation of Islam was not advanced; nor does Bada'uni, who bewailed Akbar's lapse from orthodoxy and disapproved not only of the abolition of *jizyah* but also of the

growth of Hindu influence in the affairs of the Empire, say that the abolition of *jizyah* had hampered the spread of Islam. There is no reçord of any significant difference in the rate of conversion either as the result of the abolition of *jizyah* or of its reimposition. If there had been a change such a development could not have escaped the notice of the chroniclers, especially of men like Bada'uni, who has included in his history all that could be said against Akbar's religious policies.

"If *jizyah* had been a crushing burden upon the non-Muslims, it could have led to conversions, but it was not too heavy a burden. It was levied only on able-bodied male adults who had a surplus of income after meeting the necessary expenses of maintaining themselves and their families. The religious classes like priests and monks were exempt. The rates charged were the equivalent in local currency of twelve, twenty-four and forty-eight dirhams, depending upon the income of the assessee. The assessment seems to have been lenient because at no time did *jizyah* form an important source of revenue, and a very large percentage of the non-Muslim population was exempt for one reason or another. Even if a tax is heavy but bearable, people are averse to changing their religion to escape it; but when it is not heavy, there is little inducement for conversion. Therefore, it does not seem likely that *jizyah* helped, in any significant manner, conversion to Islam."[20]

And our eminent historian says:

"We are told that after accession to the throne, Aurangzeb contemplated revival of the *jizyah* on a number of occasions but did not do so for fear of political opposition. Ultimately, in 1679, in the twenty-second year of his reign, he finally re-imposed it. There has been a considerable discussion among historians regarding Aurangzeb's motives for the step. Let us first see what it was not. It was not meant to be an economic pressure for forcing the Hindus to convert to Islam for its incidence was too light – women, children, the disabled and the

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[20]I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, reprinted by Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1985, pp. 80-81.

indigent, that is those whose income was less than the means of subsistence were exempted, as were those in government service. Nor, in fact, did any significant section of Hindus change their religion due to this tax. Secondly, it was not a means of meeting a difficult financial situation. Although the income from *jizyah* is said to have been considerable, Aurangzeb sacrificed a considerable sum of money by giving up a large number of cesses called *abwabs* which were not sanctioned by the *shara* and were hence considered illegal. The re-imposition of *jizyah* was, in fact, both political and ideological in nature. It was meant to rally the Muslims for the defence of the state against the Marathas and the Rajputs who were up in arms, and possibly against the Muslim states of the Deccan, especially Golconda which was in alliance with the infidels. Secondly, *jizyah* was to be collected by honest, God-fearing Muslims, who were especially appointed for the purpose, and its proceeds were reserved for the *ulama*. It was thus a big bribe for the theologians among whom there was a lot of unemployment."[21]

The historian then notes the infirmities in implementing the tax but his final verdict remains as considerate as that of Qureshi:

> "Some modern writers are of the opinion that Aurangzeb's measures were designed to convert India from a *dar-ul-harb*, or a land of infidels, into *dar-ul-Islam*, or a land inhabited by Muslims. Although Aurangzeb considered it legitimate to encourage conversion to Islam, evidence of systematic or large-scale attempts at forced conversion is lacking. Nor were Hindu nobles discriminated against...."[22]

Similarly, Qureshi emphasises in the same volume that Aurangzeb had no option but to wage his campaigns against Golconda and Bijapur. He remarks:

> "The Sultanates were incapable of even keeping peace within

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[21]Satish Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 232. [22]*Ibid.*, pp. 232-33.

their territories. The Marathas got their sinews of war by plundering them. Besides, the sultanates, in spite of the growth of Maratha power at their expense, were secretly in alliance with them and helped them with money and supplies. The situation in Golconda was even worse because the real power was in the hands of two Brahmin officials, Madanna and Akanna, whose obnoxious rule was resented by the Muslim population of the sultanate and who were even more enthusiastic supporters of the Marathas. Under such circumstances it would have been foolish to leave the sultanates alone."[23]

In his volume *Ulema in Politics*, Qureshi reverts to the same matter and remarks:

"The Sultanates of the Deccan had been so weakened by the Marathas that they were fast sinking into a state of anarchy. They, because of this weakness, became almost the storehouse of Maratha resources who grabbed whatever they needed from their territories. Besides they were in alliance with the Marathas, because they perversely thought that after the threat from the Mughuls had been averted, the Marathas could be dealt with more easily. This was a gross underestimate of the potentialities of the Maratha activities. So far as Alamgir was concerned, he had no choice. The Marathas and the Sultanates constituted a single problem and could not be detached from each other. Those who suggest that the Sultanates could be persuaded to act against the Marathas or could become a bulwark against Maratha expansion ignore the realities of the situation."[24]

The verdict of our eminent historian is identical. He says:

"Aurangzeb has been criticised for having failed to unite with the Deccani states against the Marathas, or for having conquered

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[23]I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

[24]I. H. Qureshi, *Ulema in Politics*, reprinted by Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1985, pp. 105-06.

them thereby making the empire 'so large that it collapsed under its own weight.' A unity of hearts between Aurangzeb and the Deccani states was 'a psychological impossibility' once the treaty of 1636 was abandoned, a development which took place during the reign of Shah Jahan himself. After his accession, Aurangzeb desisted from pursuing a vigorous forward policy in the Deccan. In fact, he postponed as long as possible the decision to conquer and annex the Deccani states. Aurangzeb's hand was virtually forced by the growing Maratha power, the support extended to Shivaji by Madanna and Akhanna from Golconda, and fear that Bijapur might fall under the domination of Shivaji and the Maratha-dominated Golconda. Later, by giving shelter to the rebel prince Akbar, Sambhaji virtually threw a challenge to Aurangzeb who quickly realised that the Marathas could not be dealt with without first subduing Bijapur and possibly Golconda."[25]

And though Satish Chandra is inclined to concede, "perhaps Aurangzeb might have been better advised to accept the suggestion apparently put forward by his eldest son, Shah Alam, for a settlement with Bijapur and Golconda to annex only a part of the territories and let them rule the South Karnataka which was far away and difficult to monitor," his understanding of Aurangzeb's compulsions is no less than that of Qureshi !

Qureshi is at pains to emphasise that Aurangzeb did not institute new laws, that, therefore, the collapse of the Empire after him cannot be attributed to his religious policies. As he puts it:

"The Muslim Empire had endured in the subcontinent for several centuries. The orthodox laws of Islam had been imposed with varying degrees of thoroughness. Alamgir I did not bring into existence a new set of laws. In the course of these centuries the *jizyah* had remained in abeyance only for a period of one hundred and fifteen years. The order for the demolition of

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[25]Satish Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

unauthorised temples had been given under Shah Jahan and Alamgir did not enforce it for the first time. If the Empire collapsed like a house of cards after the death of Alamgir I, the main causes must be sought elsewhere than in the religious policies of that emperor, though these also played some role in its disintegration."[26]

Our eminent historian emphasises the same point in almost the same words in context after context: "Aurangzeb's order regarding temples was not a new one. It reaffirmed the position which had existed during the Sultanate period and which had been reiterated by Shah Jahan early in his reign ...." And of course, *jizyah* was not being imposed for the first time, – it was being re-imposed after a gap of 115 years ![27]

And so on. Thus the "explanations" for Aurangzeb's policies are identical, all that is missing is the adoration that Qureshi holds for Aurangzeb.

The fourth point is the brazenness with which our historians suppress the evidence and, having done so, slip in falsehoods. To take just one example, recall how Satish Chandra concludes the account of Aurangzeb's deeds *vis-a-vis* temples: The order for destroying temples was not a new one; the order was limited to new temples and not to existing structures; the order left a great deal of latitude to local officials; Aurangzeb adopted "a new stance" only when he encountered political hostility and when he came to conclude that the temples had become centres from which "subversive ideas" were being spread; that the destruction of temples was more or less confined to periods of hostilities. And finally that "it seems that Aurangzeb's zeal for the destruction of temples abated after 1679, for we do not hear of any large scale destruction of temples in the South

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[26]I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-87..

[27]Satish Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 230, 231-32.

between 1681 and his death in 1707."

How does this assertion compare with what the *Akhbarat* of Aurangzeb themselves state, as well as other accounts recorded at the time? Here are some of the entries:

25 May 1679: "Khan-i-Jahan Bahadur returned from Jodhpur after demolishing its temples, and bringing with himself several cart-loads of idols. The Emperor ordered that the idols, which were mostly of gold, silver, brass, copper or stone and adorned with jewels, should be cast in the quadrangle of the Court and under the steps of the Jama Mosque for being trodden upon."

January-February 1680: "The grand temple in front of the Maharana's mansion (at Udaipur) - one of the wonderful buildings of the age, which had cost the infidels much money - was destroyed and its images broken." "On 24 January the Emperor went to view the lake Udaisagar and ordered all the three temples on its banks to be pulled down." "On 29 January Hasan Ali Khan reported that 172 other temples in the environs of Udaipur had been demolished." "On 22 February the Emperor went to look at Chitor, and by his order the 63 temples of the place were destroyed."

10 August 1680: "Abu Turab returned to Court and reported that he had pulled down 66 temples in Amber". *2 August 1680:* "Temple of Someshwar in western Mewar ordered to be destroyed."

September 1687: "On the capture of Golkonda, the Emperor appointed Abdur Rahim Khan as Censor of the city of Haidarabad with orders to put down infidel practices and (heretical) innovations and destroy the temples and build mosques on their sites."

Circa 1690: Instances of Aurangzeb's temple destruction at Ellora, Trimbaakeshwar, Narsinghpur (foiled by snakes, scorpions and other poisonous insects), Pandharpur, Jejuri (foiled by the deity) and Yavat (Bhuleshwar) are given by K.N. Sane in *Varshik Iribritta* for Shaka 1838, pp. 133-135.

1693: "The Emperor ordered the destruction of the Hateshwar temple at Vadnagar, the special guardian of the Nagar Brahmans."

3rd April 1694: "The Emperor learnt from a secret news-

writer of Delhi that in Jaisinghpura Bairagis used to worship idols, and that the Censor on hearing of it had gone there, arrested Sri Krishna Bairagi and taken him with 15 idols away to his house; then the Rajputs had assembled, flocked to the Censor's house, wounded three footmen of the Censor and tried to seize the Censor himself; so that the latter set the Bairagi free and sent the copper idols to the local *subahdar.*"

Middle of 1698: "Hamid-ud-din Khan Bahadur who had been deputed to destroy the temple of Bijapur and build a mosque (there), returned to Court after carrying the order out and was praised by the Emperor."

"The demolition of a temple is possible at any time, as it cannot walk away from its place." – Aurangzeb to Zullfiqar Khan and Mughal Khan.

"The houses of this country (Maharashtra) are exceedingly strong and built solely of stone and iron. The hatchet-men of the Government in the course of my marching do not get sufficient strength and power (i.e., time) to destroy and raze the temples of the infidels that meet the eye on the way. You should appoint an orthodox inspector (*darogha*) who may afterwards destroy them at leisure and dig up their foundations." – Aurangzeb to Ruhullah Khan in *Kalimat-i-Aurangzib.*

1 January 1705: "The Emperor, summoning Muhammad Khalil and Khidmat Rai, the *darogha* of hatchet-men ...., ordered them to demolish the temple of Pandharpur, and to take the butchers of the camp there and slaughter cows in the temple .... It was done."

The eminent historian did not need to trouble himself by going to the primary sources. He could have found these and other entries in a single compact Appendix in Volume III of Sir Jadunath Sarkar's well known *History of Aurangzib.* That history has been in circulation since 1928 ![28] Our writer, writing in 1996, is conveniently oblivious of the evidence which even an elementary student of Aurangzeb's

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[28] Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib,* Volume III, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1972 reprint, pp. 185-89.

period would have come across!

However, there is little mystery. For there are two pillars of progressive history-writing in India: first, to fabricate evidence which will establish Hindus to be intolerant; second, to respect and show an empathetic understanding of Islamic communalism.

And the litmus test of whether you are committed to secular history-writing is whether you are prepared to stand up for Aurangzeb!

Erasure to parity to absolution

Anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with the Quran, with the *Hadis*, with the history of Islamic Rule, knows that the separation between believers and non-believers is of the very essence in Islam.[1] The main concern of our eminent historians is to completely absolve Islam of such notions and of campaigns and deeds which flow from them. When they cannot but acknowledge the deeds of Muslim leaders and rulers, they attribute them to the foibles or errors of individuals. Next, as we have just seen, they give elaborate explanations to account for those individuals having taken those steps. Again and again they emphasise that the spurs for many of those actions were the deeds and attitudes of the victims themselves. And whenever they mention the intolerance or bigotry of the Muslims they make sure to generalise the matter and always slip in allusions to the Hindus also.

The history textbook for Class XII published by NCERT, *Modern India* is by our old friend, the eminent historian, Bipan Chandra.[2] In his *Foreword* the Director of NCERT

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[1]For some illustrative citations see my *The World of Fatwas*, ASA and HarperCollins, pp. 551-82.

[2]Bipan Chandra, *Modern India*, National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, sixth reprint, January 1998. Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers given in this Chapter refer to this book.

records that the earlier version of the textbook was prepared by Bipan Chandra under the auspices of an Editorial Board. The Editorial Board, you will not be surprised to learn, consisted of the familiar friends – S. Gopal, S. Nurul Hasan, Satish Chandra, and Romila Thapar.

The role of Syed Ahmad Khan in founding the Aligarh Movement, his strenuous efforts to ensure that Muslims would remain loyal to the British and shun the Congress and the nascent National Movement, his role as the originator in modern times of the Two-Nation Theory – these are all recorded. As is the role of the Muslim League. But in both cases elaborate explanations are given which amount in effect to exculpations. Thus we learn in the case of Syed Ahmed Khan:

> "However, towards the end of his life, he began to talk of Hindu domination to prevent his followers from joining the rising national movement. This was unfortunate, though basically he was not a communalist. He only wanted the backwardness of the Muslim middle and upper classes to go. His politics were the result of his firm belief that immediate political progress was not possible because the British Government could not be easily dislodged. On the other hand, any hostility by the officials might prove dangerous to the educational effort which he saw as the need of the hour. He believed that only when Indians had become as modern in their thinking and actions as the English were, could they hope to successfully challenge foreign rule. He, therefore, advised all Indians and particularly the educationally backward Muslims to remain aloof from politics for some time to come. The time for politics, he said, had not yet come. In fact, he had become so committed to his college and the cause of education that he was willing to sacrifice all other interests to them. Consequently, to prevent the orthodox Muslims from opposing his college, he virtually gave up his agitation in favour of religious reform. For the same reason, he would not do anything to offend the government and, on the other hand, encouraged communalism and separatism. This was, of course, a serious political error,

which was to have harmful consequences in later years. Moreover, some of his followers deviated from his broad-mindedness and tended later to glorify Islam and its past while criticising other religions."[3]

In other words, just a "political error" – and an error for which there were the highest reasons ! Similarly, in the case of the Muslim League, while its rank opportunism, its toeing the British line, its use of religion to instigate the ignorant masses, are all enumerated, its politics is put to British instigation and the point is emphasised repeatedly that it gained strength from the activities of "Hindu communalists." Thus we are told:

"The Muslim League propaganda gained by the existence of such communal bodies among the Hindus as the Hindu Mahasabha. The Hindu communalists echoed the Muslim communalists by declaring that the Hindus were a distinct nation and that India was the land of the Hindus. Thus they too accepted the two-nation theory. They actively opposed the policy of giving adequate safeguards to the minorities so as to remove their fears of domination by the majority."[4]

Not only that, Bipan Chandra peddles the standard secularist "thesis": the two communalisms are put at par in one breath, and, in the next, the point is made that actually Hindu communalism was "even less justified" and, therefore, one must infer, even more responsible for the outcome. This is how Bipan Chandra puts the matter:

"In one respect, Hindu communalism had even less justification. In every country, the religious or linguistic or national minorities have, because of their numerical position, felt at one time or the other that their social and cultural interests

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[3]Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 177
[4]*Ibid.*, p. 258.

might suffer. But when the majority has by word and deed given proof that these fears are groundless the fears of the minorities have disappeared, but if a section of the people belonging to the majority becomes communal or sectional and starts talking and working against the minorities, the minorities tend to feel unsafe. Communal or sectional leadership of the minorities is then strengthened. For example, during the 1930s the Muslim League was strong only in areas where the Muslims were in a minority. On the other hand, in such areas as the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab, the Sindh and Bengal, where the Muslims were in a majority and, therefore, felt relatively securer [*sic.*], the Muslim League remained weak. Interestingly enough, the communal groups – Hindu as well as Muslim -- did not hesitate to join hands against the Congress. In the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab, Sindh and Bengal, the Hindu communalists helped the Muslim League and other communal groups to form ministries which opposed the Congress. Another characteristic the various communal groups shared was their tendency to adopt pro-Government political attitudes. It is to be noted that none of the communal groups and parties, which talked of Hindu and Muslim nationalism, took active part in the struggle against foreign rule. They saw the people belonging to other religions and the nationalist leaders as their real enemies.

"The communal groups and parties also shied away from the social and economic demands of the common people which, as we have seen above, were being increasingly taken up by the nationalist movement...."[5]

Indeed, the very nature of the nationalist movement, Bipan Chandra emphasises repeatedly, alienated the Muslims and it was because of that character of the Nationalist Struggle that the overwhelming majority of Muslims stayed away from the National Movement and in the end backed the Muslim League. Therefore, once again it is the Hindus who are to be blamed !

Bipan Chandra notes Syed Ahmed Khan's propaganda:

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[5]*Ibid.*, p. 259.

that the Hindus and Muslims were two different nations, that their interests would not coincide, that Muslims would be swamped by Hindus, that their interest lay in siding with the British – Bipan Chandra recalls these and pronounces, "these views were, of course, unscientific and without any basis in reality." Muslims and Hindus of the same class and region were closer to each other than they were to co-religionists from other classes and other regions, he notes.[6] He then explains the rise of separatist thinking among Muslims in terms of their backwardness in education, and in trade and industry, and thereby to the dominance among them of "reactionary big landlords".[7] Then follows the usual string of propositions. First, he says, "the manner in which Indian history was taught in schools and colleges in those days also contributed to the growth of communal feelings among the educated Hindus and Muslims." And the flaw in the contents of these histories was that they did not subscribe to the secular line which these eminences have since made obligatory ! To recall our historian's verdict,

> "They failed to bring out the fact that ancient and medieval politics in India, as politics everywhere else, were based on economic and political interests and not on religious considerations. Rulers as well as rebels used religious appeals as an outer colouring to disguise the play of material interests and ambitions. Moreover, the British and communal historians attacked the notion of a composite culture in India."[8]

But from the very next sentence the responsibility is loaded, as usual, on to the Hindus. Bipan Chandra writes:

> "The Hindu communal view of history also relied on the myth that Indian society and culture had reached great, ideal heights in the ancient period from which they fell into permanent

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[6]*Ibid.*, pp. 204-05. [7]*Ibid.*, pp. 205-06. [8]*Ibid.*, pp. 206-07.

and continuous decay during the medieval period because of 'Muslim' rule and domination. The basic contribution of the medieval period to the development of Indian economy and technology, religion and philosophy, arts and literature, culture and society, and fruits, vegetables and dress was denied."[9]

Notice that there is not a word about Muslim historians and what they had written about India. Those history books were the triumphalist literature of the community as were the writings of influential figures such as Shah Waliullah and Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi. There is not a word about the volumes upon volumes of those who really governed and moulded Muslim thought in late 19th and early 20th century – for instance, of persons like Maulana Ahmad Riza Khan.

Three paragraphs later Bipan Chandra sets his guns not just at some unnamed Hindu communalist historians, but at the character of the entire National Movement and of its greatest leaders. This is how he assesses them:

"Unfortunately, while militant nationalism was a great step forward in every other respect, it was to some extent a step back in respect of the growth of national unity. The speeches and writings of some of the militant nationalists had a strong religious and Hindu tinge. They emphasised ancient Indian culture to the exclusion of medieval Indian culture. They identified Indian culture and the Indian nation with the Hindu religion and Hindus. They tried to abandon elements of composite culture. For example, Tilak's propagation of the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals, Aurobindo Ghose's semi-mystical concept of India as mother and nationalism as a religion, the terrorists' oaths before goddess Kali, and the initiation of the Anti-Partition agitation with dips in the Ganga could hardly appeal to the Muslims. In fact, such actions were against the spirit of their religion, and they could not be expected as Muslims to associate with these and other similar activities. Nor could

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

> Muslims be expected to respond with full enthusiasm when they saw Shivaji or Pratap being hailed not merely for their historical roles but also as 'national' leaders who fought against the 'foreigners'. By no definition could Akbar or Aurangzeb be declared a foreigner, unless being a Muslim was made the ground for declaring one a foreigner. In reality, the struggle between Pratap and Akbar or Shivaji and Aurangzeb had to be viewed as a political struggle in its particular historical setting. To declare Akbar or Aurangzeb a 'foreigner' and Pratap or Shivaji a 'national' hero was to project into past history the communal outlook of 20th century India. This was not only bad history; it was also a blow to national unity."[10]

He swiftly hems, and he swiftly haws: "This does not mean that militant nationalists were anti-Muslim or wholly communal," he says. "Far from it," he says. Most of them, he says, including Tilak, favoured Hindu-Muslim unity. To most of them, he says, the motherland or *Bharatmata* was a modern notion "being in no way linked with religion": the exact opposite of what Bharat was to them – an ancient, eternal nation, one which had at its core the Hindu religion. On our historian's reckoning, they were almost secularists ! Indeed, the inspiration that spurred the most daring among them was so modern as to be foreign ! "Even the revolutionary terrorists," Bipan Chandra says, "were in reality inspired by European revolutionary movements, for example, those of Ireland, Russia and Italy, rather than by *Kali* or *Bhawani* cults." In spite of this, however, the net effect of what they did was to disrupt the sense of national unity. And so, the hemming and hawing disposed of, our historian is back to his original verdict:

> "But as pointed out earlier, there was a certain Hindu tinge in the political work and ideas of the militant nationalists. This proved to be particularly harmful as clever British and pro-

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

British propagandists took advantage of the Hindu colouring to poison the minds of the Muslims. The result was that a large number of educated Muslims either remained aloof from the rising nationalist movement or became hostile to it, thus falling an easy prey to a separatist outlook. The Hindu tinge also created ideological openings for Hindu communalism and made it difficult for the nationalist movement to eliminate the Hindu communal, political and ideological elements within its own ranks. It also helped the spread of a Muslim tinge among Muslim nationalists."[11]

The saving grace was that, in spite of this Hindu-colouring of these nationalists, "quite a large number of advanced Muslim intellectuals" .... joined the *Swadeshi* movement, the revolutionary terrorists as well as the National Congress. How gracious of them to ignore the provocation ! The reason? "This was because the national movement remained basically secular in its approach and ideology," says our historian.[12]

The effect in this regard of the Hindu reformers was the same, Bipan Chandra teaches us. Recounting their efforts, he says,

"Moreover, the reformers put a one-sided emphasis on the religious and philosophical aspects of the cultural heritage. These aspects were, moreover, not a common heritage of all people. On the other hand, art and architecture, literature, music, science and technology, etc., in which all sections of people had played an equal role, were not sufficiently emphasised. In addition, the Hindu reformers invariably confined their praise of the Indian past to its ancient period. Even a broad-minded man like Swami Vivekananda talked of the Indian spirit or India's past achievements in this sense alone. These reformers looked upon the medieval period of Indian history as essentially an era of decadence. This was not only unhistorical but also socially and politically harmful. It tended

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[11]*Ibid.*, p. 208. [12]*Ibid.*, p. 208-09.

to create the notion of two separate peoples. Similarly, an uncritical praise of the ancient period and religions could not be fully acceptable to the persons coming from lower castes who had for centuries suffered under the most destructive caste oppression which had developed precisely during the ancient period. The result of all these factors was that instead of all Indians taking an equal pride in their past material and cultural achievements and deriving inspiration from them, the past became a heritage of the few. Moreover, the past itself tended to be torn into compartments on a partisan basis. Many in the Muslim middle classes went to the extent of turning to the history of West Asia for their traditions and moments of pride. Increasingly, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis, and later on lower-caste Hindus who had been influenced by the reform movements tended to be different from one another. On the other hand, the Hindu and Muslim masses who followed traditional ways untouched by the reform movements still lived in harmony, practicing their different religious rituals. To some extent the process of the evolution of a composite culture that had been going on for centuries was arrested; though in other spheres national unification of the Indian people was accelerated. The evil aspects of this phenomenon became apparent when it was found that, along with a rapid rise of national consciousness, another consciousness – communal consciousness – had begun to rise among the middle classes. Many other factors were certainly responsible for the birth of communalism in modern times; but, undoubtedly, the nature of the religious reform movements also contributed to it."[13]

When, in response to the chants – "Islam is the religion of peace," "The Quran and the Prophet teach, 'To you your religion, to me mine,'" – *ayats* from the Quran are cited, when *hadis* are cited and *fatwas* which direct the believer to shun, ostracise, subjugate, and suppress non-believers till they give up and embrace Islam, what do the secularists declare? No, no, in understanding a tradition we must go

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[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 181-82.

by what the believer in that tradition says, they declare. But when it comes to Hinduism, we must go by what *they*, these progressives who flaunt their emancipation from the religion and tradition, say about it !

That "many in the Muslim middle classes went to the extent of turning to the history of West Asia for their traditions and moments of pride" was the result of our leaders and reformers giving a Hindu colour to the Nationalist Movement?

Did the believer need to be instigated by these Hindu reformers before he turned five times a day to the Kaba in the West Asia? Did he need instigation from Hindu reformers or nationalist leaders before he came to regard Mecca and Madina as the places that were holy? Did he need the instigation of these reformers and nationalist leaders for holding Arabic to be the language which deserves the highest veneration – is it not Allah Himself who reminds him repeatedly in the Quran that it is in Arabic that He has sent down the Revelation?

Allah says,

"These are The Symbols (or Verses)
Of the Perspicuous Book.
We have sent it down
As an *Arabic* Quran ...." (12.1,2)

And again,

Thus have We revealed it
To be a judgment of authority
In *Arabic*...." (13.37)

And again,

"We know indeed that they
Say, 'It is a man that
Teaches him.' The tongue
Of him they wickedly point to
Is notably foreign, while this
Is *Arabic*...." (16.103)

And again,
"Thus have We sent this
Down – an *Arabic* Quran...." (20.113)

And again,
"Verily this is a Revelation
From the Lord of the Worlds:
With it came down
The Spirit of Faith and Truth
To thy Heart and mind,
That thou mayest admonish
In the perspicuous
Arabic tongue." (26.192-95)

And again,
"(It is) a Quran
In *Arabic*...." (39.28)

And again,
"A Book, whereof the verses
Are explained in detail; –
A Quran in *Arabic*...." (41.3)

And again,
"Had We sent this as
A Quran (in a language)
Other than *Arabic*, they would
Have said: 'Why are not
Its verses explained in detail?
What ! (a Book) not in *Arabic*
And (a Messenger) an Arab?'...." (41.44)

And again,
"Thus have We sent
By inspiration to thee
An *Arabic* Quran...." (42.7)

And again,
"We have made it

A Quran in *Arabic*....” (43.3)

And again,
“And before this, was
The Book of Moses
As a guide and a mercy;
And this Book confirms (it)
In the *Arabic* tongue ....” (46.12)

When Allah Himself reminds the believer that he has sent him an “Arabic Quran”, that he has sent him “the Quran in Arabic”, what further instigation does the believer need from Hindu reformers for placing that language far above mere Indian languages?

Does he need to be pushed by the “Hindu colouring” which these reformers and leaders are said to have given before holding the Arabs to be the chosen people, to whom he must hearken, to whom he must look up? Is it not the Prophet who instructed every believer that anyone who hates Arabs hates him, the Prophet himself? Is it not the Prophet who warned that “he who is treacherous to the Arabs will not be included in my intercession and will not receive my love”? Is it not the Prophet who warned that “one of the signs of the approach of the last hour will be the destruction of the Arabs”? Is it not the Prophet who admonished all believers, “Love the Arabs for three reasons: because I am an Arab, the Quran is Arabic, and the inhabitants of Paradise will speak Arabic?”[14]

Is it because the Hindus have instigated a believer that he looks to the West Asia for inspiration, or does he do so because the *hadis* instructs him:

> “God chose as the best, the children of Ishmael, the son of Abraham. From Ishmael’s descendants, God chose the Quraish

[14]*Mishkat Al Masabhi*, Book 26, Chapter 28.

(the tribe of Prophet) as the best of people; from the Quraish, God chose the Banu Hashim (the clan of the Prophet) the best of people, and from the Banu Hashim, God chose Muhammad as the best of all men ...."

In honouring not just the Arabs, and among Arabs the Quraish, is the believer instigated by these Hindu reformers and nationalist leaders? Is it not enough for him that the Prophet himself declared that believers are to be subservient to the Quraish and that the Caliphate is the right of the Quraish?[15] Does he need Hindu reformers and religious leaders to push him to regard the Quraish as pre-eminent when, Allah having said that he has sent the Quran in Arabic, the Prophet makes that declaration specific, and declares that the Quran has been sent in the Arabic *of the Quraish* – that is, in their dialect which is distinct from the Arabic spoken by other tribes?[16]

All this will be evident to anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with Islam. Nor are these esoteric doctrines, these are notions which are fed to the believer with, so to say, his mother's milk from the moment of his conversion. Every observer is struck with this insistence of Islam in wrenching believers away from his land, from his language, from his dress, from his older beliefs and turning him towards the Arabs, towards Arabia, towards Arabic, towards Arabian lore and legend. V.S. Naipaul has recently given a poignant account in *Beyond Belief* of the deep scars this basic insistence has left on the psyche of the converted. Site after sacred site, conversation after conversation etches the truth: Recounting his travels among believers Naipaul gives a heart-rending account of the consequences of this insistence. Reflecting on what the believers tell him, Naipaul remarks: "Islam is in its origins an Arab religion. Everyone

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[15]*Sahih Muslim*, Chapter DCCLIV.
[16]*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Book LXI, p. 507.

not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert's world view alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his ...."

Everyone who has cared to look at all has been struck by this uprooting, this turning to Arabs, Arabia, Arabic, Arabian lore and legend. The Quran and *Hadis* demand it. The most extensive Islamic organization in the sub-continent today is the *Tablighi Jamaat*: its sole purpose is to stamp out every trace of practices, customs, beliefs which Muslims may still share with their non-Muslim neighbours. But to our eminent historian, the turning away from India towards the West Asia is not because of Islam – it is something to which Muslims have been pushed by the Hindu-colouring which our reformers and leaders gave the National Movement !

Does the Indian who has converted to Islam require Hindu reformers or nationalist leaders to instigate him into shunning the *kafirs*, into giving up every vestige of the ways of the non-believers? From the very advent of Islam into India, Islamic preachers and reformers have had one singular aim: to exorcise every syncretistic notion and practice. From the moment of his conversion, indeed as part of the ceremony of conversion itself, the convert is made to do things which will rupture – violently rupture – his links with his Hindu past. Precisely for the reason that Ali Mian and others have pinpointed – the reason that the Hindus revere the cow – beef has a special place in this rupturing: in the feast that follows, the new convert is forced or, if you prefer, induced to eat beef openly and publicly.

Does the Muslim need to wait for some Hindu reformer or nationalist leader to distance himself from non-believers, from idolaters? Does he not learn from the Quran itself that "they are the worst of creatures," that they shall be in

Hell-fire to dwell forever therein?[17] Does he not learn from the Quran itself that they are the cause of "tumult and oppression," that they block his path to Allah, that therefore they must be slaughtered because "tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter," that they shall not cease fighting the believers until they have got believers to turn their back on the faith?[18] Does the Quran not teach him that the only wish of non-believers is "that you should reject Faith as they do, and thus be on the same footing (as them)," and that therefore the believer must take no friend from among them – till they have given up their own faith and embraced Islam?[19] Does he need to be pushed by some Dayananda or Tilak before he concludes that the believers are conspiring to do him in? Is it not Allah Himself who instructs him in the Quran, "The unbelievers spend their wealth to hinder (men) from the path of Allah, and so they will continue to spend"?[20]

Does the Muslim not learn from the Quran itself, "Strongest among men in enmity to the believers you will find the Jews and Pagans"?[21] To shun Hindus as well as the national struggle, does the Muslim need some Hindu nationalist to paint the Freedom Struggle in a Hindu hue? Does Allah Himself not declare "O, you who believe ! Truly the pagans are unclean....?[22] Does a Muslim need any instigation from mere Hindu leaders to shun Hindus and everything associated with them when Allah forbade the Prophet to pray even for his deceased mother on the ground that she had died a non-believer?[23]

Would the Muslim have needed some Tilak to paint the nationalist struggle in Ganapati Mahotsava's colour to stay away from it, as these historians would have us believe? Does Allah not tell him Himself that it is He, Allah Himself

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[17]*Quran*, 98.6. [18]*Quran*, 2.217. [19]*Quran*, 4.89.
[20]*Quran*, 8. 36-37. [21]*Quran*, 5.85. [22]*Quran*, 9.28.
[23]*Quran*, 9.113; 9.84.

who has deliberately misled non-believers, that He has done so for a purpose? Is it not Allah who tells him that He, Allah has Himself put non-believers in the Muslim's path to test the latter's faith in Allah? Is it not Allah who declares that no good that the unbelievers do shall ever carry any weight with Him?[24]

Would the believer have had to wait upon some Tilak or Aurobindo or Gandhi to decide that this was just the movement of Hindus for Hindus and therefore he should shun it? Does the Prophet not instruct him in *hadis* after *hadis* after *hadis* that he must in every particular and at all times use one criterion to decide what he should do – that is, he must see what the non-believers are doing, and do the opposite?[25]

Every Muslim learns all this from the moment he becomes aware of his faith – after all, this is one of the central themes of the faith, after all these are notions and exhortations which run through the fundamental repositories of the faith, the Quran and the *hadis*. Our historians shut their eyes tight to all this. Composite culture, composite culture, they chant. The nationalist leaders, by giving the Freedom Movement, a Hindu colour, the nationalist historians, by the way they were teaching history, drove the Muslims away from the Freedom Struggle, they charge. In sharp contrast to the way Bipan Chandra treats nationalist leaders, when he comes to talk of the *Ahrars*, this eminent historian talks of them as "the militantly *nationalist Ahrar* movement," when he talks of the *Dar-ul-ulum* of Deoband he reminds us that "similar *nationalist* sentiments were arising among a section of the traditional Muslim scholars led by the Deoband School."[26] From such descriptions of the net effect

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[24]*Quran*, 9.17; 9.69; 18.102-06; 45.7-10; 47.7-11.

[25]For representative *hadis*, see my *The World of Fatwas*, ASA and HarperCollins, Delhi, pp. 611-18.

[26]Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

of the *Ahrars* and of institutions like the *Dar-ul-ulum* of Deoband, one must infer either deceit or total ignorance of their literature and their politics. The whole attitude of the *Ahrars*, of the Deoband School, even of a person like Mufti Kifayatullah was that, by asking for a separate Pakistan, the Muslim League was confining Islam to one corner of the Sub-continent, when in fact the whole of the Sub-continent was open for establishing the sway of Islam. The *Ahrars* did not fault Jinnah from some nationalist viewpoint, they did not fault him for being too Islamic. On the contrary – their famous couplet for Jinnah was:

> *"Ik kafira ke waste Islam ko chhora*
> *yeh Quaid-i-Azam hai keh hai kafir-i-azam"*

But recalling any of that will strain the effort of our eminent historian in establishing a parity between Hindus and Muslims in regard to communalism, and therefore he just ignores the facts !

This glossing-over can be seen at every turn. The book has a paragraph on Iqbal. But for the fact that Iqbal was "one of the greatest poets of modern India," he would seem to have been, on the reckoning of our historian, a cross between Swami Vivekananda and M. N. Roy ! Students are told, "Like Swami Vivekananda, he emphasised the need for constant change and ceaseless activity and condemned resignation, contemplation, and quiet contentment. He urged the adoption of a dynamic outlook that would help change the world. He was basically a humanist." And at the end of the paragraph a line is slipped in – "In his earlier poetry, he extolled patriotism, though later he encouraged Muslim separatism."[27] If only our eminent historian had deigned to read, if not Iqbal's own political writings and those on Islam, even his *Shikwa*, at least the volumes upon

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[27]*Ibid.*, p. 178.

volumes which have been produced about him in Pakistan, if only he had deigned to ask himself why is it that Pakistani historians, political scientists and politicians ascribe such an important place to Iqbal in the creation of Pakistan, if only he had read any of these and asked whether they are doing so without basis.

Similarly, Bipan Chandra instructs students that "we must distinguish between religion as a belief or system, which people follow as a part of their personal belief, and the ideology of a religion-based socio-political identity, that is, communalism."[28] But what about all the authorities of Islam from the Prophet on down who declare that Islam embraces all of life, that Islam is not merely a matter of adhering to some personal beliefs? What about their affirmations over 1400 years that Islam is an ideology in the most comprehensive sense of the word? That believers are to regulate their political life, that they are to organise their State, that they are to enact their laws in accordance with it as much as they are to regulate other, more personal aspects of their life and that of the Islamic community in accordance with it? By that very distinction which Bipan Chandra furnishes for the students – "we must distinguish between religion as a belief or system, which people follow as a part of their personal belief, and the ideology of a religion-based socio-political identity" – is Islam not by its own definition, "communalism"?

It is not only this basic fact which Bipan Chandra glides over, he fudges the matter further. He says, "Religion is not the cause of communalism, nor is communalism inspired by religion. Religion comes into communalism to the extent that it serves politics arising in non-religious spheres. Communalism has been rightly described as political trade in religion. Religion was used, after 1937, as a mobilising factor by the communalists."[29]

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 209. [29] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Notice the last sentence – "Religion was used, after 1937, as a mobilising factor by the communalists." Who began using it after 1937? It was Jinnah and his Muslim League – in a word, the Muslim communalists. But, given his commitment to parity, our eminent historian uses the word "communalists" in general, thereby insinuating to the student that communalists from among both Hindus and Muslims began to use religion to mobilise the people after 1937.

Thus, the general "theses" which are drilled into students are: all religions have an equal potential to generate communalism; communalism among Muslims grew, not because of anything inherent in Islam, but because of fortuitous factors; in particular, it was instigated by communalism of the Hindu reformers and nationalist leaders; and this latter communalism had even less justification than the communalism of Muslim leaders; Hindu communalism was, therefore, both – the first cause as well as the more condemnable.

The accounts of topic after topic – from social reform to the making of the Constitution – are studded with the clichés these fellows have made conventional. Among reformers, Ambedkar gets much space, Narayan Guru not a word. And the Constitution, the student learns, was brought into being by "the Constituent Assembly under the guidance of Jawaharlal Nehru and B.R. Ambedkar" ![30]

And, of course, we would not expect such a committed historian to tell us the truth about the role of the Communists in the 1940s. The Cripps Mission comes and fails. The AICC passes the "Quit India" Resolution. The leaders are swept away to jails. The country erupts in spontaneous protest and violence. The British unleash unprecedented repression, says our historian:

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 272.

> "The Government on its part went all out to crush the 1942 movement. Its repression knew no bounds. The Press was completely muzzled. The demonstrating crowds were machine-gunned and even bombed from the air. Prisoners were tortured. The police and secret police reigned supreme. The military took over many towns and cities. Over 10,000 people died in police and military firings. Rebellious villages had to pay huge sums as punitive fines and the villagers had to undergo mass floggings. India had not witnessed such intense repression since the Revolt of 1857."[31]

But who was cheering this "unprecedented repression," this repression without bounds, who was assisting it? "In general," says our eminent historian, "the students, workers and peasants were the backbone of the 'revolt', while the upper classes and the bureaucracy remained loyal to the Government." What about the Communist Party of India? Did its top functionaries not hold secret meetings with officers of the British Government up to and including Sir Richard Tottenham, the Additional Secretary in the Home Department, and Sir Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member, the two who personally directed this repression which knew no bounds? What about the "Progress Reports" which the Communist Party of India regularly submitted to the British to report the good work its members were doing to sabotage the 1942 Movement?[32] Not one word from our eminence !

Hence is objective history forged !

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[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 264-65.

[32] The documents are reproduced in my M. N. Roy Memorial Lecture, *'The Only Fatherland': Communists, 'Quit India', and the Soviet Union*, ASA, 1991.

"Maybe perhaps, probably mostly.... *Therefore*"

Lord Indra is "rowdy and amoral."[1] The God Krishna has a "rather questionable personal record."[2] Lord Shiva is just "a development of phallic cults."[3] *Bhakti* is just the reflection of "the complete dependence of the serfs or tenants on the landowners in the context of Indian feudal society."[4]

The fact apart that the "evidence" for such constructions itself consists of assertions and conjectures, what a desiccated mind such assertions exhibit ! That it should see nothing but questionable conduct in Krishna, that even a foreigner – Stella Kramrisch – should see such an effulgence in the concept of Shiva and this eminent historian just the extended phallus, that he should see nothing more in *bhakti* than a reflection of feudalism – what telling evidence of the success of Macaulay, the Missionaries and Marx !

God was made accessible to everybody through *bhakti,* the historian teaches us, and this, he says, "was in tune with the social outlook of the times, when the feudatories considered themselves as meditating at the feet of their

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[1]D. N. Jha, *Ancient India, An introductory outline*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1977, 1997, p. 18. Unless otherwise indicated, all page numbers in this Chapter refer to this publication.

[2]p. 91. [3]p. 90. [4]p. xviii.

masters."[5] Surely, one of the features of feudalism was that the overlord, the monarch say, was put beyond the reach of common folk – if they were lucky, they might reach the intermediary just above them, hardly ever could they get their wail heard higher up. So why would it not have been as much "in tune with the social outlook of the times" for the Supreme Deity to be put beyond the reach of all rather than being made accessible to everyone through *bhakti*?

As one would expect from an eminent historian, the *Brahmins* and the warriors, he teaches us, had formed a "class alliance", and, therefore, "as elsewhere in India from now on the priests began to play the second fiddle to the ruler and strike mephistophelian bargains."[6] What the evidence is of the "class alliance", of the priests "playing second fiddle", of the "mephistophelian bargains" – not a word. We, the eminent historians, hold these truths to be self-evident.... !

Such assertions are standard form for our eminent historians – the widely used book of D. N. Jha, *Ancient India, An introductory outline*, is studded with these. If one were to merely reproduce what, for instance, the *Shia* scholars and historians say about three of the four "rightly guided Caliphs" and about some of the members of the Prophet's own family, if one were merely to reproduce what they say without embellishing the account with any of the adjectives and descriptions of the kind these eminent historians paste on Shiva, Krishna and others – they would be the first to jump and shout, "He is denigrating the revered figures of Islam." But as these are Hindu gods and goddesses, the adjectives are not only permissible, they are *de riguer !*

On point after point these eminent historians are forced to acknowledge that there is next to no evidence to support what they are saying. But in the very next paragraph,

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[5]p. 106. [6]p. 24.

sometimes even the next sentence, what is acknowledged to be without basis becomes a fact.

"Gold *may have been* imported from South India....," says our author. "Silver was imported *probably* from Afghanistan and Iran. Copper *may have been* brought from South India.... Alabaster *may have been* brought from a number of places both to the east and the west...."[7] But though such is the basis, the author proceeds with complete confidence to present a pre-conceived picture of Harappan life.

Excavations show that the Harappan civilisation covered areas from Musa Khel in the North-West to Kolhapur in southern-Maharashtra to locations far to the East. How a few "groups" of invading Aryans over-ran this extensive civilisation without leaving any archaeological or literary trace is not explained, but the standard "Aryans-from-Mesopotamia" theory – with an emphasis on their subjugating native Dravidians – is repeated at length.

Aryans race for settlements, cattle, booty – without an iota of evidence. From this, the further extension: "This often led to conflicts between various Aryan tribes." The Rig Veda refers to a battle of ten kings, our author says in support of his proposition. And then, "*It is likely that* there took place other inter-tribal wars of this kind, *of which we have no records*" ![8]

It is mandatory in such books to maintain that beef was eaten in ancient India, and so we read, "It (the cow) was not yet held sacred; both oxen and cows were slaughtered for food. Beef was a delicacy offered to the guest...." "The cow is described at one or two places in the Rig Veda as not to be killed (*aghanya*)," our author allows. No matter. "But this *may* only imply its economic importance," he declares ![9]

All the standard clichés: Aryans from outside; subjugate

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[7]p. 7. [8]pp. 12-13. [9]p. 14.

the native Dravidians; strive to maintain their racial purity; hence, the four castes.[10] Proof?: "*Perhaps* most of the ordinary members of the aboriginal tribes were considered as being outside the pale of Aryan life and were reduced to the lowest position in the new society. As the Aryans settled among them, they laid stress on purity of blood and feared that their assimilation with dark-skinned local inhabitants would lead to the loss of their Aryan identity [a certainty that requires no evidence in support !], *though enough non-Aryan blood already flowed in their veins*...."[11] The latter having been the case, would the Aryans still have been striving to maintain "the purity of their blood"?

"Weaving," we are told, "was practiced on a wide scale but *perhaps* remained confined mainly to women...."[12] "The rise of new arts and crafts," we are told, "*may* have led to rudimentary commodity production and trade. In this period the *vaishyas may* have engaged in trade...."[13] "*Shudras* were meant to serve the three higher *varnas* and formed the bulk of the labouring masses," we are told. "*Most likely* the community exercised some sort of general control over them; in this sense they *may* be compared with the helots of Sparta."[14] "The emergence of the *gahapati* from the V*edic* householder to a comparatively wealthy head of the household," we are told, "*may* indicate the growing disparity of wealth within society. Common people, slaves and labourers seem to have coveted his wealth and wished him harm; often he is depicted as keeping a bodyguard to defend himself."[15] "The cultural lag of the aboriginals, living mainly as hunters and fowlers," we are told, "in contrast to the *varna*-divided society.... *perhaps* led in the post-*Vedic* period to the growth of untouchability."[16] "The tremendous increase in the military

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[10]pp. 16-17 [11]p. 17. [12]p. 21. [13]p. 21. [14]p. 21.
[15]p. 31. [16]pp. 31-32.

strength and the coercive power of the State," we are told, "*seems to have* enhanced the prestige and glamour of the Maurya king...."[17]

"How far the *Arthashastra* provisions were actually put into practice *is difficult to ascertain. But there is little doubt that* the needs of the imperial administration prompted the Mauryas to increase the number of officers in their employ. All this, together with the growing importance of the warrior class from pre-Maurya times, *may* have led to the exaltation of the royal power...."[18] "Kautilya fixes the wages of artisans, who were *probably mostly* shudras. They *seem to have been* the worst paid members of the society.... He recommends the recruitment of vaishyas and shudras in the army; *but their actual enrollment as soldiers is extremely doubtful.*"[19] If some statement of Kautilya supports The Thesis of these historians, it is proof. If it goes against The Thesis, the absence of empirical evidence – which is neither cited nor available ! – leaves one "extremely doubtful" that reality accorded with that proposition !

On one page we are told in surprise, "Although a brahmana, Kautilya asks the king to confiscate temple treasures, put up sudden miracles and set up new images to collect money from the credulous."[20] Just two pages later Kautilya is charged with an anxiety to protect the position of the ex-Arya slaves as distinguished from the non-Arya or shudra slaves and this, Jha says, "is understandable; Kautilya was a brahmana."[21]

The social order, Jha says, did not function as smoothly as the brahmanical lawgivers had envisaged. The kshatriyas and vaishyas were chaffing at their lower social position and, of course, as The Theory would lead us to believe "The shudras were no less hostile to the upper classes. They were grossly dissatisfied with the conditions of their life

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[17]p. 58. [18]pp. 58-59. [19]p. 64. [20]p. 62. [21]p. 64.

and indulged in criminal activities. [Notice the, at this stage surreptitious, invention of the cause: the shudras indulged in criminal activities because they were grossly dissatisfied with the conditions of their life.] Several categories of offenders and suspects, listed by Kautilya, belonged to the shudra order. He ordains that when a shudra calls himself a brahmana, steals the property of gods, or is hostile to the king, either his eyes shall be destroyed by the application of a poisonous ointment, or he shall have to pay a fine of 800 *panas. This implies that some shudras bore hostility to the priestly and ruling classes.*"[22] Could it not be the other way around? That only those who engaged in criminal conduct were dubbed as shudras and consigned to the periphery, and that these were few in number?

The next sentence carries the projection further ! "Our sources indicate the existence of several religious sects," says the author, "which *may* have led to tensions and conflicts."[23]

And, of course, the Hindus could not have done anything original: the gods and goddesses which the Hindus worship too must have been borrowed from others, at the least for authenticity they need mention in books of foreigners ! "The Greek ambassador also speaks of Herakles being worshipped in the Mathura region," says the author, adding, "this god *may* have been Krishna of later legends."[24] Similarly, "Shri of the *Arthashastra* identified with Shri-Lakshmi (the wife of Vishnu), *may* have originally been non-Aryan fertility goddess who found her way into the brahmanical religion...."[25] As this was the case with the gods and goddesses themselves, one cannot but believe, "The main inspiration of Maurya art was *perhaps* derived from Persian imperial art."[26]

And soon the differences lead to conflict and that leads

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[22]p. 65. [23]p. 65. [24]p. 66. [25]p. 66. [26]p. 70.

to social and religious tensions ! "The ideological conflict between the Vedic brahmanas and the followers of the newly-born protestant creeds," says our author, "*may have* been a potential source of social and religious tension, *though an actual example of this is wanting.*"[27]

Could a leader who did not denounce or pulverise Hinduism ever be good? As is well known, in one of his edicts Ashoka counsels people to desist from extolling their own sect and denigrating that of others. What does our eminent author see in this? The squelching of free speech ! "By not permitting free expression of differences of opinion," warns our author, "one may very often aggravate concealed tensions." "But Ashoka's insistence on their suppression may be understood in the context of the need for unity in the empire." Jha recalls that "Ashoka banned festive meetings or gatherings," and says that this was done, "*perhaps* due to his fear of conflicts arising out of differences of opinion." While this is just conjecture, by the very next sentence it becomes the basis for an entire construction. "The measure is in conformity with the strictly centralised administration of the Maurya empire," says our author. "Popular meetings *could* be utilised to criticize and attack the king's new ideas. Their suppression *therefore seems to have been* intended to stifle any popular opposition to the king's ideas and administrative measures."[28] "*Therefore*," and "*seems to have been*" – both in the same breath, without even a comma to separate them !

In keeping with the teachings of the Buddha, Ashoka exhorted people to shun all "useless ceremonies and sacrifices." Our author's construction? "Åshoka's attack on rituals and sacrifices was *probably* intended to undermine the influence of the priests, who presided over various ceremonies and thus cashed in on popular superstition."[29]

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[27]p. 67. [28]pp. 67-68. [29]p. 68.

Notice the sequence. The eminent historian starts on the assumption that, evidence or no evidence, there must have been tension in the society. Ashoka, being anxious to serve the "need for unity of his empire" and to squash opposition to his new ideas, bans meetings. He suppresses expression of opinion, he moves to exorcise ceremonies and sacrifices. This step, one must presume from the author's own analysis, could not but have increased social and religious tensions. Nevertheless Ashoka pressed ahead with the step because of his overriding need to undermine the influence of the priests. His emphasis on non-violence, says our author, "obviously hit the interests of the brahmanas, for whom animal sacrifice was a source of livelihood."[30] The circle is thus complete: The brahmins acquire influence; they depend on sacrifices; Ashoka emphasises non-violence, and exorcises sacrifices; thereby he undermines their influence ! Circle completed ! Theory proved !

The guilds come into being, the variety of professions multiplies. To his discomfiture, our author has to acknowledge that the condition of even the artisans improved. But our author is quick to recover his gloom and censure ! "Artisans and craftsmen were largely drawn in this period from the shudras," says our author, "who gained in wealth and status on account of the progress of crafts and commerce.... The economic distinctions between the vaishyas and the shudras thus tended to be blurred...." That, unfortunately, is an unavoidable fact, and so our author moves swiftly to discount it ! "But most of the artisans known from inscriptions were confined to the Mathura region and the western Deccan," he says. "It is therefore difficult to postulate any change in the living conditions of the main body of the shudras." Could it not be that the condition of the shudras in general did improve but that

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[30]pp. 68-69.

the relevant inscriptions have yet been discovered only from Mathura and western Deccan? Indeed, that they have been recovered from areas which, given the primitive modes of transport and communication must be considered to have been far apart, would suggest that the improvement was pervasive.

And notice also how scrupulous and demanding our author is regarding evidence on this point, and how on other matters – those which will enable him to push his prejudice – he is satisfied with "may have," "perhaps," "probably mostly". And so a few sentences later our author has recovered his composure fully, and we get his firm conclusion: "Most shudras seethed in discontent. *It is not unlikely that* under such foreign rulers as the Shakas and Kushanas, who were not committed to the varna ideology, they turned against the brahmanas. This *may* explain why Manu provided a number of safeguards against the hostile activities of the shudras" ![31]

A few pages later we are fed the standard line which we have encountered in other books also of these eminent historians – "The growing popularity of Buddhism and other heterodox sects went against the Vedic sacrifices involving animal slaughter. The heretical attack on Vedic institutions and sacrifices seriously undermined the prestige and authority of the brahmanas...." Thus far The Theory with which we have become familiar: Brahmins depended on sacrifices; Buddhism undermined them by weaning the people from sacrifices. Next, its development. To save themselves the brahmins, "therefore appropriated a number of popular cults with significant following," says the author. "In the process brahmanical religion underwent some important changes and most of the Vedic gods passed into oblivion," and their places were taken by Brahma, Vishnu

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[31]p. 85.

and Shiva.

Of course, the attributes read into these gods could also not have been original to the Hindus ! Thus, about the notion that when evil is rampant Vishnu appears in various incarnations to save mankind, says our author, "*perhaps* the idea was borrowed from the bodhisattva doctrine of Buddhism. It *may* have evolved with the identification of Vishnu with Krishna...."[32]

While he is ever so scrupulous in demanding evidence about improvement in the condition of shudras, our author has no difficulty in deciphering the inner workings of the mind of Chandragupta ! The author, in his chapter about the Gupta period entitled, "The Myth of the Golden Age," says, "After centuries of political disintegration an empire came to be established in AD 319 under the Guptas. Their origin and original home cannot be determined with certainty. But *very likely* they were initially a family of landowners who acquired political control in the region of Magadha. The first Gupta ruler of consequence was Chandragupta I. By marrying a Lichchhavi princess *he sought to gain in prestige* though Vaishali does not appear to have been a part of his kingdom...."[33]

"Perhaps" leads to "therefore" which proves The Theory – by establishing the progressive immiserisation of the artisans and peasants and their sinking into being the property of vested interests ! "The weakening of the commercial links with the western world," says our author, "*perhaps* stopped the movement of artisans and traders from one part of the country to the other." Next sentence: "Immobile artisans *therefore* remained attached to villages where they produced for local consumption. In course of time they, like the peasants, were also transferred to the recipients of village endowments."[34]

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[32]p. 89. [33]p. 96. [34]p. 102.

In spite of the labours and proclamations of the brahmin lawgivers, "The varna system did not always function smoothly," the student is taught by our eminent historian. "The *Shanti Parva* of the Mahabharata which *may be* assigned to the Gupta period, contains at least nine verses which stress the need of combination of the brahmanas and the kshatriyas; these *may* indicate *some kind of* concerted opposition from the vaishyas and shudras...."[35]

A verse, says our author, speaks of vaishyas and shudras willfully uniting themselves with the wives of brahmins. From this one verse the author deduces, "The shudras seem to have been particularly hostile to the existing social order." "The *Anushasana Parva* of the Mahabharata represents them as destroyers of the king. Another [unnamed] contemporary work describes them as hostile, violent, boastful, short-tempered, untruthful...." "All this as well as passages from the legal texts," declares our author, "*would suggest* a conflict between the shudras and the ruling classes. *But references to actual revolt by the shudras against the upper classes are not recorded.*"[36]

By such reiteration, on the basis of such "evidence" the eminent historian paints a picture of a society riven by discord, a society in which the masses are pushed into penury and disability. To de-fang the resulting discontent and revolts of the poorest classes, the clever brahmins set the Boa Constrictor of Hinduism, to, on the one hand, appropriate local cults and, on the other, inveigle into the minds of the masses doctrines and notions which would reconcile them to their dismal lot.

Having struck a "class alliance" with the rulers, having struck their "mephistophelian bargains," the brahmins gird up to counter the twin challenges – of the campaign against sacrifices by Buddhists and by the growing tradition of

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[35]p. 105. [36]pp. 105-06.

asceticism. "The brahmanas *by way of compromise invented a formula*," says our author, "by which the life of an Aryan individual was divided into four stages (*ashrams*)...."[37]

Brahmins invent the Theory of Karma to persuade the poor masses that they should serve their masters well in this life so that they may get their reward in some subsequent life. They invent *avataravad* to persuade the suffering masses that they need not do anything in particular, for God himself shall take form and relieve them of the evil which is crushing them. By teaching us that our condition depends on our deeds, does the Theory of Karma induce us to sit helplessly, "O, what can I do, I must have done something wrong that I am in this condition"? Or does it give us the assurance, "Arise, awake, do your duty; what you do is what will determine your fate"? As for *avtarvada*, having assured Arjuna that when evil mounts, to annihilate the evil and protect the good, He takes form, does Krishna tell Arjuna to, therefore, leave things to Him, Krishna? Or does He exhort Arjuna to act, to fight and uproot evil himself?

What is seen by all to be proof of the inclusive character of Hinduism is to our author proof of its being the Boa Constrictor. "The adoption of various deities, beliefs and superstitions by Vaishnavism," says our author, "indicates that it assimilated different popular cults and substituted faith for logic. It therefore acted as an effective instrument for reconciling the masses to their lot and maintaining the social division based on *varna*."[38]

The double standard is as much a hallmark of these books as invention and conjecture. For the very things on account of which they extol Islam, for which they are in raptures about the Soviet Union, for those very things they condemn Hindus, their texts, their teachers, their rulers !

Bhakti is just a reflection of the subservience of the hapless

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[37]p. 26. [38]p. 108.

tenant to the landlord under feudalism. The very word "Islam" means "surrender", they teach us in the same breath; such an exalted sentiment, they exclaim – total submission to the will of Allah.

The taxes imposed by the Maurya kings were oppressive exactions for maintaining an ever-expanding coercive apparatus of the State, Jha insinuates.[39] But the *jaziya* exacted by the Sultans was, as we have seen, a little something by paying which Hindus were able to lead normal lives ! When Aurangzeb revived it, it was not, we have seen, meant to put any economic pressure on Hindus to convert to Islam, it was not imposed to help the Empire deal with financial difficulties either. Its incidence was meant to be light, and care was taken to ensure that it would be collected by honest, Allah-fearing Muslims ! And there were many exemptions, don't forget – "women, children, the disabled, the indigent, those whose income was less than the means of subsistence" were exempted, as were those who were being useful to the Empire by being in its service !

The Mauryas instituted a centralised, overbearing State. Their army was an instrument for maintaining domination, it was the coercive arm of the State. Their legal and judicial system was, as such systems are, "an important weapon of coercion in the hands of the ruling class."[40] The standard line: from the textbook for Class III students in West Bengal to this college guide. Now, that being their standard, firmly held, so oft-repeated thesis, how come our eminences never come to say of Islamic law, the armies of the Sultans and of the Mughal rulers that they too are weapons of coercion, domination, control?

The laws enacted by the Republican States of ancient India extended the State's tentacles to such an extent that it came to control the private life of individuals and families,

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[39]pp. 49-50. [40]pp. 50-51.

charges our author.[41] But Aurangzeb's orders to destroy temples, why they left a great deal of latitude to local officials, as we have seen, in any case they were not anything new, in any case they were not enforced after 1679, in any case no general order to destroy temples seems to have been given, in any case Hindus were left free to worship in the privacy of their homes.... !

Propositions from Kautilya and Patanjali are cited – invent cults so as to exact money from the ignorant, stage sudden miracles to garner money from the credulous, break up hostile tribes by using spies, prostitutes, soothsayers, poison, cash.... – as proof that this was the pattern of life.[42] This is what Kautilya has written, therefore this is what must have been happening – that is the reasoning. But when I cite the Quran, the *Hadis,* the *fatwas,* when I adduce five hundred pages of evidence from them, the standard retort is, "But who follows these texts?"

The pattern works the other way too. Affirmations which do not fit The Theory – for instance, the clearest possible statements in the texts that a person is a Brahmin not by virtue of his birth but by virtue of living up to the duties and norms which have been prescribed – are brushed aside: "But they are just desiderata," our theoreticians argue. "There is no proof that life was lived in accordance with these statements of good intentions." The statements in Manu that provide discriminatory punishments for identical offences are, of course, proof that differential justice was meted out in practice ! As the provision in Stalin's 1937 Constitution granting the right of self-determination to nationalities – a provision which these textbooks invariably cite – is proof that the Soviet State in fact granted such an option to nationalities ! As the fact that none of the nationalities exercised the option between 1917 and 1985

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[41]pp. 54, 58. [42]pp. 62-64.

is proof that the Soviets had solved the nationalities problem !

In this textbook as in others, Hinduism is charged with assimilating local cults. This is a doubly useful charge – on the one hand it is used to argue that there is nothing original in Hinduism, that it is just a piling up of practices taken from local, animist, fertility cults, the emphasis being on the last ! And, on the other, to argue that it is a Boa-Constrictor which does not let any other religious tradition survive. The point is also made that the older traditions and beliefs have survived none the less, that the people continued to retain, as they retain today, beliefs in malevolent spirits and the like.[43] Have you ever seen a book by any of these scholars which points out, as Ali Dashti and others do, that the entire ritual associated with the *haj,* for instance, is a carry-over of pagan practices from pre-Islamic periods? Or that the Quran is full of verses about malevolent *djinns* and the like?

Ashoka's tolerance is put to his compulsions – he had to adopt this posture of tolerance because of the need to maintain the unity of his Empire, we are taught by our author.[44] But those two sentences in the Quran – "To you your religion, to me mine," and "There is no compulsion in religion" – which are flatly over-run by the text itself, to say nothing of the entire history of Islamic rule over 1400 years, those two sentences are flaunted as proof-positive of Islam being not just committed to peace and tolerance, they are proof that it is *The* Religion of Peace and Tolerance !

Although Kanishka convened the Fourth Buddhist Council, although great Buddhist scholars and teachers were admittedly associated with him, Kanishka's conversion to Buddhism is declared by our eminent historian to have been "political". Kanishka went through no profound

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[43]p. 66. [44]pp. 67-68.

experience, he says.[45] Have you ever come across any of these eminences looking askance on this ground – the absence of "profound experience" – at the lakhs of conversions which Islamic invaders and rulers secured at the point of the sword? Or at the mass-conversions which Christian missionaries arrange even today? Those are a result of profound inner experiences, are they?

"Simultaneously with the emergence of these gods," writes the eminent historian, "Brahmanism was assimilating a variety of popular cults. Animals, trees, mountains and rivers came to acquire divine association. The cow became an object of worship; *the seeds of modern communal politics centering round the 'sacred' animal were thus sown....*"[46] He would, of course, not see the seed in the fact that while the Quran does not require the sacrifice of cows,[47] the text has been altered by Islamic authorities in India; he would not see the cause in the fact that "Muslim divines" like Ali Mian instigate Muslims here to kill cows in India *precisely because cows are revered by the Hindus* – those being their precise words.[48]

In Jha's book as in others of this school, Hindus are invariably condemned for sacrifices "involving animal slaughter," they are lampooned for getting their come-uppance in Buddhism and Ashoka who weaned the people away from these sacrifices. Lakhs and lakhs of animals – cows, goats, and the rest – are slaughtered every *Id.* Ever heard any of these eminences characterise these sacrifices as "involving animal slaughter"? And, of course, were a Hindu or Buddhist at a dinner to request vegetarian fare, he would be sneered at as a primitive by these jet-set progressives.

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[45]p. 75. [46]p. 90.

[47]The relevant *ayats* are *Quran*, XXII.34-37.

[48]For illustrative extracts, *The World of Fatwas, op. cit.*, pp. 143-64.

When Manu specifies different tasks for different sections, he is held up as urging this on behalf of an exploitative order. Simultaneously the Guptas are condemned for demanding the same work as compulsory labour from all sections of society ! Our eminent historian fumes: "In the Maurya period slaves and hired labourers were subjected to forced labour; this was supervised by an officer and was paid for. But in Gupta times it was extended to all classes of subjects, and it came to include all kinds of work." Of course, that the Soviets demanded "all kinds of work" from "all classes of subjects" – specially in the slave-labour camps – is proof-positive of their abolishing class-distinctions, of their ushering in the egalitarian Paradise !

"The *Kamasutra* of Vatsayana informs us," our author continues, "that peasant women were forced to perform unpaid work of various kinds, such as filling the granaries of the village headman, taking things in and out of the house, cleaning the house, purchasing of cotton, wood, flax, hemp and thread, and the purchase, sale and exchange of various articles....".[49] Not very onerous, I would think, compared to what lakhs like Solzhenitsyn were forced to do in what has been to these eminences "The Only Fatherland". And if you point to either fact – either to their double standards in the two cases, or to the fact that Soviet society was characterised by even sharper differences between haves and the not-in-the-Party have-nots than free societies – you are a reactionary-revanchist-communal-fascist !

Jha like the rest strains to ensure that every facet from which pride in the past may be derived is tarred. Monarchies were replaced by some Republics, and there was some democracy in these new formations, you say? A "glorified", "much trumpeted notion", scoffs our historian. True, "all

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[49]D. N. Jha, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-02.

important issues were placed before the assembly, and no decision was taken in the absence of unanimity among its members," but the assemblies consisted mostly of kshatriyas – and so these republics were really oligarchies and not true democracies.[50] As the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Peoples Republic of China surely were – true democracies not oligarchies !

The final chapter is climactic. The nationalist historians have portrayed the Gupta Age as a Golden Age, says Jha. That is a myth, the period was nothing of the sort.

True, the Guptas extended the Empire, our historian cannot but acknowledge. But it did not cover all of India, he says – he is requiring "full democracy," he is requiring that the whole of India be one when talking of *fifteen hundred* years ago ! The fact that rulers in the South paid tribute to the Guptas, the fact that a southern ruler sought permission of the Gupta king to do something, these do not establish that the Guptas exercised suzerainty over the latter, he says.

Having denounced the Mauryas for setting up a centralised administration, our eminence denounces the Guptas for decentralising it.

True, he says, philosophy, art, literature flourished – Ajanta, Ellora, Kalidasa, Aryabhatta...., the poor man is forced to acknowledge. But he is not the one to give up. The paintings of Ajanta fall to his searching class-analysis ! "Although the theme of paintings at Ajanta is religious," he pronounces, "one can see in them a dramatic panorama of the life of princes, nobles, warriors and sages. The general impression one gets is one of affluence of the upper classes; the normal hardships of the village folk are not portrayed in the paintings."

True, there was an efflorescence of Sanskrit literature,

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[50]pp. 52-53.

Jha has to admit. But this literature too falls – by the same touchstone, class-analysis ! "Sanskrit literature, like art," he declaims, "was mainly enjoyed by the court, upper classes and the aristocracy. The uneducated masses could have hardly understood and much less appreciated the ornate court literature. Not surprisingly therefore the leading male characters of high social status in the contemporary plays speak polished Sanskrit, and those of low status and all women speak Prakrit." And what proportion of "the uneducated masses", pray, understood Lenin's *Collected Works,* to say nothing of Mao's "philosophical essays"? !

True, the astronomical works of Aryabhatta and Varahamihira were noteworthy, our author admits. But their insights were not followed up, he swiftly adds. In any case, progress represented in the writings of such observers "owed, only in part, to indigenous tradition...." One of the five astronomical systems dealt with by Varahamihira was Roman, a second one was of Paul of Alexandria, says our author. What of the other three? What of Aryabhatta's insights – among these that the earth revolves around the sun, that it rotates on its axis? The thing that strikes our author about such insights is not that they were so far ahead of Copernicus and Kepler but that they were "contrary to the established Indian notion" !

So the notion of "the so-called Hindu renaissance," he says, rests on the writings of Kalidasa alone. "But the works of Kalidasa," declares our historian, "are not indicative of an intellectual rebirth or revival of literary activity; they merely imply a further development of the literary forms and styles which were evolving in the earlier period." Not just Kalidasa, "The *Puranas* had existed much before the time of the Guptas in the form of bardic literature, in the Gupta age they were finally compiled and given their present form." Had the stories Shakespeare used for his plays not existed before? Did his writing not amount, does not virtually all writing amount to "merely.... a further

development of the literary forms and styles which were evolving in the earlier period"?

Even the growth of *bhakti*, the turning to gods and goddesses which these historians usually adduce as evidence of increasing oppression in society is now pooh-poohed lest it become grist for the nationalists. "Nor does the growing popularity of Vaishnavism and Shaivism mean any religious resurgence," our author declares. "The basic tenets of the two religions [notice – not the two sects of Hinduism, but *"the two religions"* !] go back to earlier times; now in the context of emerging feudalism they could attract a greater following."

What to talk of that "so-called Hindu renaissance," the term Hindu itself is a misnomer, our historian declares. "It was first used by the Arabs in the post-Gupta period," he says, "to describe the inhabitants of Hindu [*sic.*] (India). Ancient Indians never thought of themselves as Hindus." What they thought of themselves as is, naturally, a detail so minor that so eminent an authority cannot but leave it for others to work out !

His role is to lay down the Line, which he does with the air of finality that we would expect from so exalted an authority: "The much-publicised Hindu renaissance was, in reality, not a renaissance, much less a Hindu one."[51]

Jha's triumphal conclusion:

> "Some Indian historians have been so enamoured of the Guptas as to tirelessly speak [that is how those who these eminences disapprove of speak, never the eminences; how do the latter speak? Tiresomely?] of their rule as representing a golden age of Indian history. In an emotionally surcharged multi-volume work [the other man's work is marred by emotion, never their's !] we are told in a vein of romantic lamentation: 'life was never happier'. Yet it was during the period of the

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[51]For the foregoing discussion, pp. 112-15.

Guptas that in certain parts of the country [how much of the country's area or population did these "certain parts" cover?] serfdom appeared leading eventually to the economic bondage of the peasantry. Women became an item of property and came to live in the perpetual tutelage of man, notwithstanding their idealisation in art and literature [what appears in art and literature, if it runs counter to The Theory, is mere "idealisation"; what appears in Manu, so long as it can be yoked to shore up The Theory, is proof of the way things were in real life !]. Caste distinctions and caste rigidity became sharper than ever before; law and justice showed a definite bias in favour of the higher castes. [That on the basis of such "evidence" as we have seen. And now see what he does to the statement of one of his prime witnesses which goes contrary to The Theory.] Fa-hsien, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim-scholar who came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II, tells us that the people were generally happy. True, the upper classes were happy and prosperous, and lived in comfort and ease, as can be judged from the contemporary art and literature. But this could have been hardly true of the lower orders; the Chinese pilgrim speaks of the plight of the chandalas. The untouchable class as a whole came to be degraded further in the social scale. Social tensions continued. But religion was used as an instrument for maintaining the varna divided society."

The lesson?

"For the upper classes all periods in history have been golden; for the masses none."

Hence, his eminence's final message for our wobegone masses:

"The truly golden age of the people does not lie in the past, but in the future."[52]

In 1917, perchance? !

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[52]For this concluding peroration, pp. 115-16.

Gavah chust, muddayi sust !

So, the gods of the Hindus are "rowdy and amoral," with a "rather questionable personal record," they are just developments of primitive cults – animism, fertility and the rest, specially the phallic cult ! Ashoka's policy of tolerance grew out of compulsions of State, not conviction. Kanishka's Buddhism too was just politic as it did not spring from any profound inner experience. Aryabhatt's insights can scarcely be reckoned as they were against accepted Indian notions! Kalidas' works were just a development of what was being written. The order as a whole and throughout the recorded history of India has been exploitative, marked by seething tensions. In particular, the Gupta Age was no Golden Age. That Golden Age lies in the future, and that future lies in 1917 !

What fidelity to the Commandments ! For hath not the First in-the-Trinity warned, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain," and has he not therefore commanded,

> "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution

of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead...."[1]

Hence, off with the Golden Age stuff ! You say such twisting of facts, the drawing of such definite conclusions from such infirm data is not objective ? Had the Third-in-the-Trinity not *shown* that objectivity, like "freedom" in writing is just a mask for hiding the *real* interests one is serving ? Had he not *shown* that writing "cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups," that "it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat" ? Had he not therefore commanded,

> "Down with non-partisan writers ! Down with literary supermen ! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard of the working class...."

Of course, everyone is free, and will be free to write whatever he wants, "without any restrictions," he had assured. "I am bound to accord you, in the name of free speech, the full right to shout, lie and write to your heart's content. But you are bound to grant me, in the name of freedom of association, the right to enter into, or withdraw from, association with people advocating this or that view" – and as I now control the State, and because all you are doing is to shout, lie and write to please and enrich yourself....!

You talk of freedom, objectivity – that is "sheer hypocrisy". Had he not *shown*,

> "There can be no real and effective 'freedom' in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live

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[1]Karl Marx, "The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume I, pp. 398, 400.

like parasites. Are you free in relation to your bourgeois publisher, Mr. Writer, in relation to your bourgeois public, which demands that you provide it with pornography in frames and paintings, and prostitution as a 'supplement' to 'sacred' scenic art ? This absolute freedom is a bourgeois or anarchist phrase.... One cannot live in a society and be free from society. The freedom of the bourgeois writer, artist or actress is simply masked (or hypocritically masked) dependence on the money-bag, on corruption, on prostitution."

As that freedom is just a mask for serving the masters' interests, as it is freedom only to provide pornography and prostitution to the masters, what if it is sacrificed for the good of the masses it serves to exploit and crush ?! Hence, one twist of the vice after another, hence one writer after another packed off. Hence our duty to rip off the mask and show the reality behind these pretensions to freedom and objectivity :

"And we socialists expose this hypocrisy and rip off the false labels, not in order to arrive at a non-class literature and art (that will be possible only in a socialist extra-class society), but to contrast this hypocritically free literature, which is in reality linked to the bourgeoisie, with a *really* free one that will be *openly* linked to the proletariat...."[2]

Recall Panikkar's fuming : "He [that is, me] cannot hope to remain a virgin after selling himself in the flesh-market.... As for me [that is, Panikkar], unlike him, I do not hunt with the hound and run with the hare. I contribute signed articles to the publications of the Communist Party, because I believe in the ideals it stands for...." !

So, uprooting the moorings of the people, discrediting and destroying every element in the past from which the

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[2]For the foregoing passages, V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume X, pp. 44-49.

people may derive pride and identity – these are as essential to the purpose of these progressives today as they were to the purposes of the Missionaries and Macaulay in the nineteenth century. So, what they do is done to a high purpose, and is therefore beyond such bourgeois criteria as objectivity and veracity. As what the rest do is to perpetuate the exploitation of the labouring masses, what if we plant a concoction or two to further the Great Cause !

So, writers have to write in service of the Great Cause. And *what* they have to write in regard to the history of a country has all been set down already by the "classics" as the Great Ones are called. *Marx* : the mode of production determines the relations of production, these in turn determine the social, political, intellectual process in general; at first property is commonly owned, there are no classes, society is egalitarian; with the increasing incapacity of this arrangement to meet the growing requirements of the population, land becomes scarce, falls to private ownership, classes emerge in society....; division of labour, class differences increase....; class antagonisms intensify....; the form of the State, its appurtenances – law, bureaucracy, the coercive apparatus, the ideology that is given currency, religion – are all instruments of the ruling class to perpetuate its hegemony. *Engels* : the sequence goes through five stages: classless primitive society; slave economy; feudalism; capitalism; socialism and finally communism.... *Lenin* : that the book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in which Engels spells out this sequence is "one of the fundamental works of socialism every sentence of which can be accepted with confidence, in the assurance that it has not been said at random but is based on immense historical and political material"; that this sequence is a *universal* law, that *all* countries and societies pass through those stages :

"The development of *all* human societies for thousands of

years, *in all countries without exception*, reveals a general conformity to law, a regularity and consistency...."

And the stages were spelled out by the "classics", as also the characteristics of each stage :

"....so that at first we had a society without classes – the original patriarchal, primitive society, in which there were no aristocrats; then we had a society based on slavery – a slave-owning society.... The division into slave-owners and slaves was the first important class division. The former group not only owned all the means of production – the land and the implements, however poor and primitive they may have been in those times – but also owned people. This group was known as slave-owners, while those who laboured and supplied labour for others were known as slaves."

You will recall that the very words are reproduced in the books we have been surveying – from the Class IV textbooks of the West Bengal government to the more erudite books of our eminents ! And then the next stage, duly discovered as such in ancient India by our eminents :

"This form was followed in history by another – feudalism. In the great majority of countries slavery in the course of its development evolved into serfdom. The fundamental division of society was now into feudal lords and peasant serfs. The form of relations between people changed.... It was not considered that the feudal lord owned the peasants as chattel, but that he was only entitled to their labour, to the obligatory performance of certain services. In practice.... serfdom.... in no way differed from slavery...."

Thence, within feudalism a new class – the capitalist class....

"The economic power of the landowning class declined and the power of the new class – the representatives of capital – developed. The reconstruction of society was such that all

citizens seemed to be equal, the old division between slaves and slave-owners disappeared, all were regarded as equal before the law irrespective of what capital each owned; whether he owned land as private property, or was a poor man who owned nothing but his labour power – all were equal before the law. The law protects everybody equally; it protects the property of those who have it from attack by the masses who, possessing no property, possessing nothing but their labour-power, grow steadily impoverished and become converted into proletarians. Such is capitalist society.... This society advanced against serfdom, against the old feudal system, under the slogan of liberty. But it was liberty for those who owned property...."

Again, the words are repeated verbatim in our books. Intensifying contradictions, breakdown, growing consciousness and consolidation of the proletarians.... And then the Golden Age....

And so the firm advice, and the singular pair of spectacles through which *everything* must be viewed :

"This fundamental fact – the transition of society from primitive forms of slavery to serfdom and finally to capitalism – you must always bear in mind, for only by remembering this fact, only by examining all political doctrines placed in this fundamental scheme, will you be able to properly appraise these doctrines and understand what they refer to; for each of these great periods in the history of mankind, slave owning, feudal and capitalist, embraces scores and hundreds of centuries and presents such a mass of political forms, such a variety of political doctrines, opinions and revolutions, that this extreme diversity and immense variety (specially in connection with the political, philosophical and other doctrines of bourgeois scholars and politicians) can be understood only by firmly holding, as to a guiding thread, to this division of society into classes, this change in the forms of class rule, and from this standpoint examining all questions – economic, political, spiritual, religious. etc."

Any doubt about the guidelines our historians have been

following in writing their textbooks for the NCERT ?! Can we be surprised when one of these eminents goes to such pains to ensure that the republican States of ancient India are not looked upon too highly when the Master has declared,

"In every course on the history of ancient times, in any lecture on the subject, you will hear about the struggle which was waged between the monarchical and republican states. But the fundamental fact is that the slaves were not regarded as human beings – not only were they not regarded as citizens, they were not even regarded as human beings. Roman law regarded them as chattels. The law of manslaughter, not to mention the other laws for the protection of the person, did not extend to slaves. It defended only the slave-owners, who were alone recognised as citizens with full rights. But whether a monarchy was instituted or a republic, it was a monarchy of slave-owners or a republic of slave-owners. All rights were enjoyed by the slave-owners, while the slave was a chattel in the eyes of the law; and not only could any sort of violence be perpetrated against a slave, but even the killing of a slave was not considered a crime. Slave-owning republics differed in their internal organisation, there were aristocratic republics and democratic republics. In an aristocratic republic only a small number of privileged persons took part in the elections; in a democratic republic everybody took part – but everybody meant only the slave-owners, that is, everybody except the slaves. This fundamental fact must be borne in mind, because it throws more light on the question of the state and clearly demonstrates the nature of the state."

Should we have been surprised at the West Bengal textbook teaching the Class III student : the emergence of personal property, the growth of classes, the rich expropriating the poor, the poor being denied their due and in addition being subjected to *atyachar*, the slaves rebelling, to discipline them the rich creating law, police, courts...? Should we have been surprised at the extreme labour our eminent friends put in to establish the expansion

and consolidation of the Mauryan State as being nothing but the manifestation of the ruling classes acquiring the means of coercion...? Should we be surprised when our eminent historian says that there must have been clashes and tension even though evidence of these is not available...? Had the Master not written it to be an axiom that

"The state is a machine for the oppression of one class by another, a machine for holding in obedience to one class other subordinate classes.... Neither under slavery nor under the feudal system could a small minority of people dominate over the vast majority without coercion. History is full of the constant attempts of the oppressed classes to throw of oppression.... In order to maintain their rule and to preserve their power, the feudal lords had to have an apparatus by which they could unite under their subjugation a vast number of people and subordinate them to certain laws and regulations; and all these laws fundamentally amounted to one thing – the maintenance of the power of the lords over the peasant serfs...."[3]

The very words repeated again and again – from Class III textbooks of Bengal to the histories of ancient India written by our eminent historians. Stalin set these assertions and periods in stone by making them a part of the text the faithful memorised, *A Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* ! Indeed, the books of our friends on ancient India can be seen as just a padding up with Indian examples a paragraph and a half from this textbook! Just as textbooks for students of classes III to VI of the West Bengal Government can be seen to be the exact facsimiles of the paragraphs ! Here is the sum total of what these books teach us expressed in Stalin's gospel :

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[3]For convenience the preceding statements of Lenin on periodization and the State have all been taken from just one of his lectures : "The State," delivered at the Sverdlov University in 1919: *Collected Works*, Volume XXIX, pp. 470-88.

"....In primitive society people lived in tiny communities and jointly owned the means of production – the land, minerals, forests, waters and implements of labour. There were neither rich people nor poor; all were equal. But gradually there emerged private ownership of the means of production, and society was divided into the propertied and the non-propertied. The owners of the means of production began to exploit those who had no such means.

"Thus, society was split up into slaves and slave-owners in remote antiquity. The slave had no rights at all. He was considered not a human being but simply a 'talking implement' belonging to his master. The slave-owning system was replaced by the feudal system, under which society consisted of feudal lords and serf peasants. The peasants were attached to the land and their status differed little from that of slaves. But they nonetheless had a small personal husbandry on the plots of land given to them by the landowner, and for this they had to work for their lord for a certain number of days. The feudal system gave way to capitalism. In capitalist society all the basic means of production belong to the capitalists and the landowners. As distinct from the slave and the serf, the worker is a free man. But he owns nothing but the skill of his hands. To live he is compelled to hire himself out as a worker to the capitalist, to sell him his labour power. Essentially, capitalism is a system of hire-slavery."[4]

Each repeating the other, and thereby *proving* the proposition.... The Great Ones having laid down the immutable and universal laws which govern history, the Great Ones having set out the stages through which *all* societies invariably pass, the test of fidelity became repeating, and re-re-repeating the propositions. It also became the test of scholarship : all one had to do was to excavate some fragment which would "prove" that the propositions advanced by the "classics" held true for India

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[4] *A Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977 reprint, p. 23.

also, all one had to do was to weave these statements into one's narrative, indeed to spin one's narrative in such a way that, from time to time, these sentences emerged as if logically. And when in need, one could always affirm, that the situation *must* have been in accord with the propositions "though an actual example of this is wanting" ! And anyone who doubted that would *by that very doubt* be proving that he was objectively working for the interests of the exploiting classes !

Regurgitating these phrases, returning to them every few pages, having become the necessary as well as sufficient condition of scholarship, our historians have done no more : take that single lecture of Lenin, take just that paragraph and a half from Stalin's *Short History*, and you have the sum total of the analytical content of our eminent historians' output on ancient India. That is the pathetic aspect to history-writing during the last thirty years. There is a comic aspect too.

As more and more facts became available about the ancient world, Marxist scholarship exerted to "refine", to "further develop" the laws and stages which Marx and Engels had set up. This became all the more necessary as more information about regions outside Europe became available. Even in the Soviet Union, even during the blight of Stalin's decades, Marxist scholars tried to go beyond the strait-jacket of laws and stages set out by the founders. Often this was the result of individuals falling out of favour with the rulers: one moment M. N. Pokrovsky rules the roost – the exemplar of Marxist historical writing; the next he is accused of having totally misunderstood and misrepresented Marx; in denouncing him, his traducers advance contrary versions of Marxist propositions...., only to be denounced soon for those propositions.... Each somersault created the occasion, it *necessitated* a new version, a new "interpretation", another "creative development" of the "classics".

It was recognised that new information even about ancient

Greece and Rome did not fully accord with the formulations of Marx and Engels : it could not be denied, for instance, that their characterisation of earlier Graeco-Roman society as a "slave-holding" society had been based upon a gross exaggeration – by Engels – of the number of slaves in Greek city-states. As more information became available about pre-historic societies, it became more and more difficult to sustain the fiction that these had been characterised by commonly-owned property, by egalitarian harmony; indeed, it now became impossible to deny that even in the animal world social structures were stratified.

In the same way, it became difficult to fit Asiatic societies into categories which had, after all, originated from information about the evolution of societies and states in Europe, and that too only from information which was available in mid-19th century. Piles of additional information even about Europe has become known since then, and heaps more about China, India, and other societies. Sub-classifications and sub-periods accordingly were developed.

But here in India a simplistic recitation of the earlier phrases and categories remained enough. It is not just fidelity to the masters, therefore, which characterises the history writing by these eminences. It is a simple-mindedness!

But there is an additional factor. White-washing the Islamic period is not the only feature which characterises the work of these historians. There is in addition a positive hatred for the pre-Islamic period and the traditions of the country. Over the years entries about India in Soviet *Encyclopedias*, for instance, became more and more ductile. They began to acknowledge ever so hesitantly that the categories and periods might need to be nuanced when they were extended to countries like China and India. They began to acknowledge that at various times there had been an overlapping and co-existence of different "stages". And, perhaps for diplomatic reasons alone, they became

increasingly circumspect – careful to avoid denigrating our traditions.

In the standard two-volume Soviet work *A History of India*,[5] for instance, we find more or less the same characterisation of the different periods in Indian histories as we do in the volumes of our eminent historians. But the Soviet volumes have none of the scorn and animosity which we have encountered in the volumes of our eminent historians.

Soviet historians also maintain that after Kalinga Ashoka "merely changed his methods to some degree," that "without forgetting his power and using force where necessary, the Mauryan ruler employed in the main ideological and diplomatic weapons," that "relying on specially appointed officials and on diplomatic missions he went out of his way to consolidate his influence in territories not yet conquered, promising their inhabitants the emperor's affection and good care, fatherly concern and all manner of support."[6] They too maintain that "there is reason to believe that Ashoka was to a certain extent obliged to pursue a policy of religious tolerance, for orthodox and heretical teachings (apart from Buddhism) were still too strong for him to do otherwise," that "it was precisely his policy of religious tolerance combined with skillful control exercised by the state over the life of various religious sects which enabled Ashoka to avoid conflict with the strong stratum of Brahmans, the Ajivikas, the Jains, and at the same time to promote Buddhism so effectively," that "when Ashoka abandoned this policy of religious tolerance in the last years of his reign and began to pursue an overt pro-Buddhist policy, this gave rise to determined opposition among the

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[5]K. Antonova, G. Bongard-Levin, G. Kotovsky, *A History of India*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Volumes I and II, 1973, English translation 1979.

[6]Volume I, p. 67.

adherents of other religions and brought serious consequences for the king and his administration."[7] In a word, in the Soviet volumes also, Ashoka's tolerance is a policy of expedience.

But while our historians concoct the theory that Brahmins, put out of livelihood by Ashoka's moves against sacrifices, undermined his rule, the Soviet historians put the blame on Ashoka himself. They write that "towards the end of his reign Ashoka bled the state coffers white as a result of the generous gifts he made to the Buddhist Order to promote the propagation of Buddha's teachings." They say that his officials warned his grandson, Sampadi of the consequences of "the emperor's excessive gifts to the monks and demanded that they be revoked at once." "On Sampadi's orders Ashoka's instructions with regard to the offerings to the Buddhist Order were not carried out," they write. They say that according to a number of sources Sampadi was an adherent of Jainism and that the queen Tishyarakshita "(who was also an opponent of Buddhism) took part in this conspiracy as well."[8]

The Soviet historians give an extensive account of the Republics. There is none of the scorn, there is none of the effort to cast doubt over the achievement at such an early date of democratic features in governance which we find in our eminent historians. On the contrary. Soviet historians record how these republican unions "waged a resolute struggle against the monarchies and on a number of occasions secured impressive victories." "Buddhist sources even list some republican states among the 'great lands'," they write. "Both classical and Indian sources depict these non-monarchical unions as flourishing lands with a smoothly running system of administration and a high level of culture," they write. They are, of course, careful to note

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[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

that in some of these unions "the real power was concentrated in the hands of the aristocratic council of the *kshatriyas*." They note the "internal contradictions" and class struggles within the assemblies of these republican unions, but they also note that "the all-important characteristic of the political organisation to be found in the *ganas* and *sanghas*, which distinguished them from the monarchies, was that broad strata of the population were involved in political affairs, a fact which made them firm and durable unions."[9]

They talk of Kanishka as "one of the most famous rulers of ancient India." They recall his attachment to Buddhism. There is none of the derision about his conversion having taken place without any profound inner experience![10]

The intellectual and spiritual synthesis which the *Gita* forged, the great and original breakthroughs it marked for instance, in the concept of inaction-in-action – the central importance it came to acquire in the minds of the people, the testimony of its vitality and centrality which is contained in the fact that so many leaders – Tilak, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, even Jawaharlal Nehru – hearkened to it – all these are recorded. The importance that the *Gita* attaches to *bhakti* is recalled. But there is none of that reductionism – "*bhakti* is the handmaiden of feudalism" – which we find in our eminent historians.[11]

The work of Kalidasa is referred to as "one of the pearls of ancient Indian literature," as "an illustrious page of history of world's culture." Kalidasa is credited with moving beyond the "idealised image of Buddha and his faithful disciples" that one finds in the writings of Ashvaghosha. "Without swerving from earlier traditions Kalidasa stood out as an innovator in many respects," the Soviet historians write in contrast to our eminences. "This explains why his

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[9]*Ibid.*, pp. 98-100. [10]*Ibid.*, pp. 118-19. [11]*Ibid.*, pp. 148-51.

work has been so accessible to the minds and hearts of the people of India throughout many centuries," they write.[12]

Similarly, while our eminent historians pour water even over the work of scientists of ancient India, the Soviet historians write :

"The first centuries AD were marked by major scientific achievement. This was particularly true of such fields as mathematics, astronomy, medicine and chemistry. Scientific treatises relating to a number of disciplines appeared. Requirements of the economy did a good deal to promote the advance of mathematics. Mathematics was important in relation to the construction of religious edifices, and for purposes of worship.

"In the ancient period and in the early Middle Ages lived the outstanding mathematicians Aryabhata (fifth and early sixth centuries), Varahamihira (sixth century) and Brahmagupta (late sixth and early seventh centuries), whose discoveries anticipated many scientific achievements of modern times. Aryabhata knew that *pi* equaled 3.1416. The theorem known to us as Pythagoras' theorem was also known at that time. Aryabhata proposed an original solution in whole numbers to the linear equation with two unknowns that closely resembles modern solutions.

"The ancient Indians evolved a system for calculation using zero, which was later taken over by the Arabs (the so-called Arabic numerals) and later from them by other peoples. The Aryabhata school was also familiar with sine and cosine.

"Aryabhata's follower, Brahmagupta, put forward solutions for a whole series of equations.

"Indian scholars of this period also scored important successes in the sphere of astronomy. Certain astronomical treatises of this period have been preserved, and these *siddhantas* bear witness to the high level of astronomical knowledge attained by the ancient Indians.

"Scholars of the Gupta period were already acquainted with the movement of the heavenly bodies, the reasons for eclipses of the Sun and the Moon. Aryabhata put forward a brilliant

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[12]*Ibid.*, p. 169.

thesis with regard to the Earth's rotation on its axis.

"Brahmagupta (many centuries before Newton) suggested that objects fall to the ground as a result of terrestrial gravity.

"Interesting material relating to astronomy, geography and mineralogy is found in Varahamihira's work *Brihat-samhita*...."[13]

While our eminent historians try to belittle the achievements of Indian art and architecture in the ancient period – by insinuating that it was derived from other countries, by seeing in it only a reflection of the life of the privileged classes – Soviet historians talk of the high standards the Indians attained in these spheres. They talk of its high originality. They talk of "the true masterpieces of Indian world of art" as exemplified in the Ajanta caves.[14]

Whereas our friends see in *bhakti* only an instrument which was fashioned in feudalism to ensure the personal fealty of the serf to his lord, Soviet historians see in it at least one redeeming feature! They see it as a device by which the people broke loose of ritual, and found a way to establish direct communion with the object of their worship. In a word, they present *bhakti* as a device of social protest, and not as an instrument to tighten social bondage.[15]

While our friends whitewash the religious policy of the Sultans and fabricate the fiction of a policy of "general toleration," Soviet historians present a more candid account. After detailing the steps Firuz Tughluq took to roll back the disastrous consequences of Muhammad Tughluq's reign, they write :

"Yet at the same time Firuz was subjecting to cruel suppression all heretical movements, persecuting the Hindus and the Shiah Moslems. During campaigns against Hindu princedoms (in particular Katehr) he made slaves of the local population and

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[13]*Ibid.*, pp. 170-71. [14]*Ibid.*, pp. 172-75.
[15]*Ibid.*, pp. 197-98, 225-27.

would use their labour on the royal estate. Following their Sultan's example, his officers also began to acquire slaves. According to the historian Barani there was a total of close on 180,000 slaves in the country at the time."[16]

Whereas our friends ascribe a policy of "general toleration" to the Delhi Sultanate, the Soviet historians write :

"After the Delhi Sultanate had been set up, India found itself within the cultural orbit of the so-called Moslem world. The ideas of Islam started to penetrate Sind in the seventh century and other parts of Northern India in the ninth century. But in the Delhi Sultanate Islam was made the state religion that was foisted upon the local population by force. Various sections of the Hindu population adopted the new religion, a small part under force and others because of the privileges to which it gave them access, since only Moslems were able to hold prominent posts. A third group took this step in order not to pay the *jizya* or poll-tax on non-Moslems, while members of the lower castes did so in the hope of avoiding the disadvantages attendant on their status."[17]

In contrast to the rationalisations upon rationalisations which our eminent historians fabricate to explain away the religious policy of Aurangzeb, the Soviet historians write :

"Aurangzeb's accession to the throne meant that the more reactionary circles of the *jagirdars* now enjoyed decisive influence at court. This cold, calculating politician was a fanatical Moslem and his victory over Dara Shukoh signified the advent of a policy, which stripped Hindus of their rights, and of a drive to persecute Shiah Moslems. In order to bring the life of the country in accordance with the precepts of Islam, Aurangzeb banned Shiah festivals, the drinking of wine, the playing of music, painting, dancing, the sowing of the drug

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[16]*Ibid.*, p. 208. [17]*Ibid.*, p. 224.

bhang, etc. Between 1665 and 1669, he gave orders for Hindu temples to be destroyed and for mosques to be erected from their dębris. Hindus were not allowed to wear any marks of honour, to ride elephants, etc.

"The heaviest burden of all was the poll-tax on non-Moslems, or *jizya*, introduced in 1679, that had been abolished by Akbar. This led to popular disturbances in Delhi, Gujarat, Burhanpur, etc. The Marathas, Rajputs and Jats all rose up in protest. The Afghan Moslems also rose up in revolt. This urge to achieve independence and freedom from the Moghul yoke serves to reflect the fact that a number of Indian peoples were showing the first signs of national consciousness. They began to perceive the Moghul state as something alien and oppressive, as something that often offended their religious feelings. The popular movements undermined the power of the Moghul empire."[18]

It is only when the Soviet textbook comes to cover the 1930s and later years that it also becomes comic. For these decades, the textbook reads like our newspapers of today! "The emergence of a communist movement in India and the formation of workers and peasants political organisations,".... "The left forces assume a strong position in the national movement, struggle for leadership intensifies,".... "Intensified class struggle,"....

But even in regard to this period, even in regard to the record of the Communist Party in 1942, the Soviet textbook is more honest than the histories written by our friends. As we have seen, our history books completely black out what the Communists actually did during, say, the Quit India Movement. By contrast the Soviet textbook records :

> "At this particular stage, as was later acknowledged by the Communist Party of India, certain mistakes were made, both with regard to the Party's political platform and also to the

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 255.

implementation of the tactics they adopted, mistakes which served not to promote but rather undermine the unity of the anti-imperialist forces. The CPI's Central Committee took a negative view of the 'August Revolution' and also supported the 'Lahore Resolution' drawn up by the Muslim League on the setting up of sovereign states in those regions where Moslems constituted the majority of the population. Despite a resolution drawn up by the CPI's Central Committee in September 1942, which put forward demands for the release of Gandhi and other leaders, an end to repressive measures, the legalisation of the National Congress and the creation of a Provisional National Government, relations between CPI members and the Congress leaders continued to deteriorate. This development can also in part be explained by the considerable successes scored by the CPI in 1942-1945 as it succeeded in extending and consolidating its influence within mass-scale public organisations."[19]

Not quite the whole truth, nor the truth alone – it would be too much to expect them to acknowledge that the "mistakes" the C.P.I. committed at the time, which they mention, were committed at the direct and express instructions of Moscow! But at least a shadow of the truth !

Thus, there are two points to remember. First, our friends are not just Marxists, they are also Macaulayites. Second, they are Marxists in a special sense. They are Marxists in the sense that they have thought of themselves as Marxists, in the sense that they repeatedly regurgitate a handful of Marxist phrases and assertions. But more than being Marxist historians, they have been establishment historians. Their theories and "theses" have accorded not just with the "classics" of Marxism-Leninism, they have accorded with the ideology of, which in terms of their Theory means, the needs of Congressite rulers.

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[19]Volume II, p. 228.

Context and consequences

The tug of intellectual fashions

History is but one subject. The Indian Council of Historical Research is but one institution. These intellectuals have over the years captured an array of institutions and professions. Through this dominion they have controlled public discourse in general. They have set the intellectual fashion, they have determined what is politically correct and what is not. The effects are all around us. Occurrences that bedevil us every other day provide ready examples. To begin with, the instances seem unconnected. But only, "to begin with".

No one in the twentieth century has done as much to rid us of untouchability as Gandhiji. He attached more importance to ridding Hinduism of this accretion than to attaining Swaraj. He brought upon himself the hostility of orthodox opinion all over India by his uncompromising stand on the matter. But the other day, speaking during the commemorative session of Parliament, Kanshi Ram asserted that abolishing untouchability was never on Gandhiji's agenda. Not one person stood up to contradict him, not one stood up to point to the record of forty years of our country's recent history.

Similarly, consider what the press would have been saying and doing if some government other than one headed by a "Dalit" had spent *Rs. one hundred crore* on a park, and contrast it with the way it reacted to Mayawati doing so. Or

how it would have screamed itself hoarse if a government had used public funds to put up statues of Lord Rama, and contrast that with the silence it so studiously maintained as Mayawati used the very same funds to set up statues of Ramaswami Naicker and Ambedkar.

Take the project she launched towards the end of her six months. She instructed officers to hasten and give gun-licences to "Dalits", in effect to persons her party-factotums certified as being the ones who should have guns. Such a venture is bound to spell disaster. When Mulayam Singh comes to power, he would follow this initiative up by ordering officers to give licences to the "other backwards", that is to cohorts of *his* party. Thus armed, gangs of the two would swiftly plunge UP to the depths of Bihar. No divine foresight was needed to see this sequence. But the press remained completely silent.

From personal knowledge born of his extensive travels in areas where Muslims are congregated and from his intimate acquaintance with them, in his *Indian Muslims, Need for a Positive Outlook*,[1] Maulana Wahiduddin states that as a community Muslims are much better off today than they were, say at the time of Partition. He gives telling instances in support of this fact. But, he says, to acknowledge the fact in public is regarded among Muslims as betrayal of the community.

Till the collapse of the Soviet Union, our Communist parties, and Communists secured "assistance" of all kinds from the founts in Moscow and elsewhere. From the silence they maintained, it would seem that it was mandatory for liberals to remain silent about the "assistance". Not just that. For the Communists to take "assistance" was taken to be entirely legitimate – woe upon the one who hesitated to believe that they were doing so only for a higher cause. On

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[1]Al-Risala Books, New Delhi, 1994.

the other hand, in those who were not of that persuasion they condemned honesty as "puritanism", they lampooned them for making a "fetish of honesty", an exhibition of it.

"I would like to review your book myself," said the editor of one of our principal newspapers about *Worshipping False Gods*. "But if I praise it, they will be after me also. I too will be called communal, high-caste and all that." "Brilliant, Arun, it was fascinating," said a leading commentator who had written a review that inclined to the positive. "But, you'll understand, I couldn't say all that in print. But it really *is* brilliant. How do you manage to put in this much work?"

The very selection of reviewers tells the same story. If there is a book by a Leftist, editors will be loath to give it to a person of a different point of view: "They will say, I have deliberately given it to a Rightist," the editors are liable to explain. On the other hand, if it is a book by a person they have decided is a Rightist, they will be loath to give it to a reviewer who also has been branded a Rightist: "They will denounce me for deliberately giving the book to a person who is bound to praise it," they will bleat. Therefore, in such cases they deliberately give the book to a person who "is bound to condemn it" !

A newspaper quotes a friend as saying about my book, *Worshipping False Gods*, "Arun Shourie has quoted verbatim from the five volumes of *Making of the Indian Constitution* vis-à-vis Ambedkar. The mistake he has made is that he has selectively quoted from the book. He hasn't quoted from the part where Dr. Ambedkar said that he was the chairman of the Drafting Committee but there were others like Iyer, B.N. Rau and T.T. Krishnamachri, who had helped in framing of the Constitution. This kind of selective omission and to condemn the person and take it in the context of his life is not fair...." I don't understand the latter part of the last sentence; its obscurity, however, may have been the contribution of the correspondent. But on the main point

about selective omission, and the example that had been given: it so happened that the friend had actually been among the most helpful in disseminating the volume; and that particular passage he had cited had been reproduced in full at pages 596 and 597 of the book. Now, I have not the slightest doubt that the friend knows me well enough to know that I wouldn't do the kind of thing he was ascribing to me. I had no doubt too that he could have easily located the passage – it had been mentioned in the Index itself. "But he had to say all that so as to be able to continue to sell your book through his shop," explained a friend who knew us both.

I get evidence every other day of this compulsion to conform. The number of persons who had taken the trouble to reach out and tell me that I had done "the greatest possible service" to the country by exhuming the facts about Ambedkar, for instance, was overwhelming – among these were persons from several political parties, as well as some very conspicuous names from among non-Mahar "Dalits". Indeed, it was not till the Ambedkar book came out that I got to know what the non-Mahar "Dalits" thought of the idolisation of Ambedkar. But all this was in private, much of it furtive. On occasion, the very same persons – having not just thanked me profusely for nailing the myth, but having actually purchased a substantial number of copies of the book for distribution among influentials in their state – denounced it in public, they even joined in the demand that the book be banned !

Or take the even more pervasive phenomenon. As our commentators never tire of reminding us, Party publications and a few exceptions apart, our newspapers are owned by capitalists. And yet it is these very newspapers which have for as long as anyone can remember denounced Capitalism, which have for decades extolled Naxalism, which enforced the taboo against talking the truth about the Soviet Union, about Mao's China.

The examples seem disconnected at first sight. In fact they testify to the same phenomenon: the force of the intellectual fashion of the times. For the last half century, in India this fashion has been set by Leftists. Now, this is a miracle that needs some explaining, some understanding. For on the face of it, that this lot should have been able to set the standard is a total incongruity. They had been ranged against the Freedom Movement for most of the preceding decades. They had brazenly been proclaiming that the Soviet Union was to them "The Only Fatherland". Every forecast made by their much-vaunted "Theory" had been totally belied by the course events had taken: that the rate of profit would decline in capitalist economies; that the masses would be progressively immiserised; that the capitalist economies would be convulsed by progressively more intense crises; that the toilers would get progressively organised; that they would form behind the phalanx of a Communist Party; that the exploited would then overthrow the exploiters, that the expropriators would be expropriated....

Everything went the other way. In the end, their proclamations failed on the one test they had said was the only one that mattered – namely, that of practice: the Soviet economies collapsed by the sheer weight of their wooden inefficiencies. But they still set the standard in India !

The explanation consists of several layers. In spite of their record during the Independence Struggle, it is to the Macaulay-Missionary-Marx class that power devolved after 1947. There were, to begin with, the intellectual fashions in Europe: the new rulers, Pandit Nehru in particular, were much affected by them. More than just "affected". As is well known, the Communists used to abuse Panditji day-in-and-day-out: "the running dog of Imperialism" was one of their milder epithets for him. But the more they abused him, the more, it would seem, Panditji became anxious not to fall further afoul with them. He would over-compensate in other areas. He would extend his umbrella even farther

to shield and protect them. Mrs. Gandhi, of course, had no inkling at all about Theories, evidence regarding Theories and the rest. She had adopted the progressive idiom for harvesting votes. These people had taken out the copyright on this kind of sloganeering. She adopted them as her natural allies, always straining to ensure that they would furnish the certificates she needed to continue to convince the poor, and groups such as the Muslims that she had their interests at heart. This anxiety, coupled with her ignorance of their "Theory" and its record in practice, as well as her great faith in her own ability to handle others made it that much easier for Leftist operators to surround her, and occupy positions from which they could place their henchmen in vital posts – in universities, in institutions like the Indian Council of Historical Research.

Tenure has ensured that their evil has continued after them ! And that it will continue for a long time as yet. Tenure in the universities, and its counterpart in the press, the Working Journalists Act, will by themselves ensure that it is a decade and more before the grip of that fashion over what is taught, over what appears in print, over the questions and answers on which persons are adjudged for government service will be loosened. So, the initial explanations are historical, almost accidental, followed by institutional inertia. But there is more.

There is specialisation for one, and with it a technology honed over decades. While they have always talked in terms of "the masses", these people have from the beginning realised the importance of the influentials, of the fact that decisions in societies even as vast as India are taken by just a few thousands. Among these are the ones who man the apparatus of the State and the opinion-makers. Accordingly, they have always paid great attention to these groups. Often getting at one through the other: those who man the State are greatly influenced by the intellectual fashions of the day; those in the media can often be had through the

patronage and information which can be doled out through the State. Paying attention to these sections might seem obvious, but other groups, taken in by the notion that "the masses" are the ones that matter, have not paid the attention to the influentials which these progressives have.

The press is a ready example of their efforts, and of the skills they have acquired in this field. They have taken care to steer their members and sympathisers into journalism. And within journalism, they have paid attention to even marginal niches. Consider books. A book by one of them has but to reach a paper, and suggestions of names of persons who would be specially suitable for reviewing it follow. As I mentioned, the editor who demurs, and is inclined to send the book to a person of a different hue is made to feel guilty, to feel that he is deliberately ensuring a biased, negative review. That selecting a person from their list may be ensuring a biased acclamation is talked out. The pressures of prevailing opinion are such, and editors so eager to evade avoidable trouble, that they swiftly select one of the recommended names. This result is made all the more certain by the fact that, realising the importance of ideas and books, progressives have made it a point over the years to have their kind fill positions which others considered marginal in journalism – such as that of the person looking after the books-page, the one looking after the "Letters to the Editor" columns.

You have only to scan the books pages of newspapers and magazines over the past fifty years to see what a decisive effect even this simple stratagem has had. Their persons were in vital positions in the publishing houses: and so their kind of books were the ones that got published. They then reviewed, and prescribed each other's books. On the basis of these publications and reviews they were able to get each other positions in universities and the like.... Even positions in institutions which most of us would not even suspect exist were put to intense use. How many among us

would know of an agency of government which determines bulk purchases of books for government and other libraries. But they do ! So that if you scan the kinds of books this organisation has been ordering over the years, you will find them to be almost exclusively the shades of red and pink.

Again, you and I would not think this to be an effort of much consequence: so what if one set of publishers is given a leg-up by this agency purchasing a few hundred or even a thousand copies of some book?, we would ask. But that is only because we do not know the publishing business: given the minuscule print-runs of our publishers, the fact that a publisher can be sure of selling, say, five hundred copies through this network in the case of one book, and not have this assurance in the case of another book, will prove decisive.

So, their books are selected for publication. They review each other's books. Reputations are thereby built. Posts are thereby garnered. A new generation of students is weaned wearing the same pair of spectacles – and that means yet another generation of persons in the media, yet another generation of civil servants, of teachers in universities....

And books are but the smallest of their activities: "Letters to the Editor" are orchestrated in the same way. As are "analyses": one of them asserts, "The book is nothing but the last war-cry of the twice-born." Writing in another paper, the other says, "As the leading commentator .... in his trenchant analysis of Shourie's latest diatribe has *shown*, the book is nothing but the last war-cry of the twice born...." Assertion becomes a thing established !

In an unorganised, unsuspecting society such as ours, even these purely organisational maneuvers prove decisive. But in a sense, even these devices are results, not causes. After all, why is it that those who were in positions of power found this lot so useful? Why did intellectuals gravitate to this world-view in spite of the fact that every shred of evidence showed that it had no basis at all?

The appeal of "The Theory", and the antidote to it

"Progressives" of the kind we have been surveying have always recognised the power of ideas and evidence. And, therefore, of those who will generate, garner, broadcast these. They have devoted time and resources to this activity, to inveigling idea-men into their fold, to knitting networks among these "intellectuals".

And they have always seen that ideas have to be worked out at two levels. To attract intellectuals, a theory must be, first, The Theory of Everything – that is, it must explain all the phenomena which are of interest to the intellectual in that particular context: Marxism laid claim to doing exactly this. Second, it must be difficult to comprehend, sufficiently obscure at points for the intellectual to fill years trying to "interpret" it, eventually to "develop" it further: part of the reason the manuscripts of the early-Marx were even more attractive than his later, published writings was that they were even more opaque than the latter. Scholars spent life-times fixing what the ratios were which, when measured, would tell the tale Marx had said would unfold, they built careers and repudiated friendships determining what exactly the rate of profit was which was to be declining – for the rate everyone understood it to imply did not show any sign of declining ! Mao's essays "On Contradiction", "On Practice", "On Dialectical Materialism", the later one "On

Dialectics" were just as masterly in their opacity and obscurity.

But as far as the "masses" are concerned, the complexity and incomprehensibility of these ideas serves an entirely different function. They naturally do not comprehend them. But the fact that they can be told that The Theory is there, the belief that it has all been worked out, that what is happening – the course History is taking – is entirely in accord with the formulations of The Theory, that what the Party or its drummer-boys – these intellectuals – are proposing to do is what The Theory shows ought to be done, that the programme is bound to succeed because it accords with the march of History which The Theory has already unraveled to the elect – these are a potent hallucinogen.

Progressives have always seen the value of The Theory as stupefacient. Of course, they denounced other priestly classes for keeping the rites and texts of their religions secret, but, as far as their own texts were concerned, they made sure that these remained mysterious. And, to use their favoured expression, if one looks at the question "objectively", that is if one goes by what the objective effect of the deed was, we notice that the elucidations of the texts – by an Althusser, for instance – were designed to reinforce the notion that the texts were abstruse and deep, that their true meaning could be discerned only by the elect few, that what these worthies had in turn discovered to be the true meaning was itself beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals. It followed that the masses needed these intellectuals, and even more so The Party of which they were, in their own reckoning, guides and counselors.

But just as valuable as keeping the doctrine complex and esoteric was simplification. Not so much the progressive intellectuals as those who directed them – the controllers of The Party, The Movement – knew that just as the masses are fortified in their faith once they believe that there is a

grand explanation behind everything that is being done, they are averse to going into details. Whether it is a proposition about some event or it is some policy measure, people do not go by the detailed reasons for it, nor by the details of evidence in its favour. They go by the general temper of the times: one group gets branded "reactionary" the other progressive and secular, a proposal gets stamped "anti-people" – this branding determines how the people will react to it. And what label will get pasted on to a group or a proposal, the progressives have known, depends not on the merits of the case, but on the skills and effort which are deployed for the purpose. Whether it is an essay of Lenin or an article of one of our present-day hacks, more space and passion are spent for pasting a label on the adversary than in setting out rational arguments and evidence. In fact, pasting the label, putting a colour on the one who is to be refuted is recognised as the principal task. In his *Encounters With Lenin,*[1] Valentinov recounts Lenin telling him, "Plekhanov once said to me about a critic of Marxism (I've forgotten his name) 'First let us stick the convict's badge on him, and then after that we will examine his case.' And I think that we must 'stick the convict's badge' on anyone and everyone who tries to undermine Marxism, even if do not go on to examine his case. That's how every sound revolutionary should react." Branding is the special skill these intellectuals have honed.

And what Eric Hoffer called "religiofication" – the skill to transform mundane pursuits, mere tactical maneuvers into Holy Causes. In the case of the progressives this was achieved, as Professor Hayek explained, by appropriating the catchwords of the 19th and 20th centuries: "scientific"; "rational", "justice", "equality". When a value was too obviously associated with the one they were opposing, they

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[1]Nikolay Valentinov, *Encounters with Lenin,* Oxford, London, 1968.

made out – again by the same devices of repetition, echo-chambers and the rest – that what the other fellow was actually doing under that rubric was the sham of the real thing, that the value in its "true form" was found only in the Fatherland, in what *they* were striving for. While Gandhi talks of "freedom", they screamed, his concept of "freedom" is just a clever ruse, the clever *bania's* ruse to perpetuate the exploitative order. While western societies have "democracy" in form – elections, for instance – actually only muscle and money determine the outcome. While they have a so-called independent judiciary, in such societies "law" itself is an instrument for sustaining the existing order.... In a worker's State, on the other hand, democracy is real, freedom is not just a monopoly of the microscopic ruling minority, it is the common possession of all. The slightest tightening of labour laws in a capitalist country was *ipso facto* admission of the worsening crises of Capitalism, it was proof of the heartless suppression of the toiling masses; but in the Soviet Union and China it was but natural that workers and peasants should forego the right to strike, the right to bargain about the terms and conditions of work, to form their own organisations – because the State itself belonged to them....

This appropriation of values that had a penumbra made "religiofication" possible. These intellectuals and the Party or ideology they served were the only ones who were committed to "justice", "equality", "freedom". And their commitment to it, the course they had mapped for attaining these was not based on mere sentimentalism, it was based on a scientific analysis and understanding of History. Therefore, anyone who stood in the way was opposing the liberation of the downtrodden masses, he was an instrument, "a conscious, chosen instrument" of the exploiters. Accordingly, all means were justified in putting him out of harm's way....

This "religiofication" was a skill they honed. And, in

turn, making The Theory itself a religion served many purposes: the votary was liberated from qualms, from "bourgeois qualms" about ordering mass executions, about conspiring to pull down others, about pasting that convict's badge on them, circulating canards about them, planting forgeries. Everything was in the cause of The Revolution. What a relief this was: the progressive intellectual could indulge the bully in him without inhibition, without limit. The Theory became all the more attractive. And with their dexterity at generalisation, they "developed" The Theory into new realms: they couldn't get along with their fathers, they denounced family as an instrument of oppression; they wanted to sleep around with other women, they pronounced marriage and morals to be bourgeois hangovers....

The greatest lure of The Theory was that it had been adopted by the ones who were seizing power – Lenin, Stalin, Mao – by groups that were about to seize it – the groups in India, for instance, which our intellectuals have baptised as "resurgent". Becoming espousers and developers of The Theory, they got close to, or could make-believe they were close to Power: as leeches on a wrestler may think that they are the ones who are toppling the opponent.

There was also another reason for The Theory's attractiveness, one that seems paradoxical at first sight. One side of the picture was that these intellectuals craved for power, for being liberated from norms, from qualms, and The Theory did that for them. The other side was that it satisfied the craving of these intellectuals for abasement, for being flogged, so to say. Lenin, and later Stalin and Mao had made sure that the centrality of The Party was built into The Theory as its key-stone. There scarcely is any body of writing which pours as much abuse and ridicule on intellectuals as the essays of Lenin and Mao. In the course of the Revolutions and Movements too, waves upon waves of intellectuals were crushed to death and exile. But that

only seemed to have made The Theory, and of course The Revolutions occurring in their Meccas, even more beguiling for our progressives here. This quality of satiating the masochistic urges of our intellectuals was as important a ground for the popularity of The Theory as its giving the bully in them free rein.

And, of course, both parts of the exercise – taking up The Cause on the one hand, and being flogged – made them feel virtuous. Because they were shouting in the name of the poor, they were *for* the poor. Because they were for the poor, everything they did was justified. Not that they were poor – in fact, one of the things that made The Theory attractive was that it justified *their* having a good time: it is but right that we dupe the exploiters, that we do them out of their wealth, their women, the great teachers had said.

The Theory enabled them to believe that they were acting on behalf of the poor, and in addition that they alone were acting on behalf of the poor. In particular, the poor themselves were often not acting in their own interest – this was one of the most comforting results of The Theory. For the poor were the prisoners of "false-consciousness", remember? When they opposed The Party and its Line, they were "objectively" acting as the unwitting instruments of the very ones who were exploiting them. It was as imperative, therefore, that the wretches be put down – by the million, if that alone would do.

All this has been the longest-running hoax of the last hundred and fifty years. The Theory was an empty box into which anything could be stuffed, from which anything could be conjured up. In practice it was failing by the year. The claim to "Justice" in the face of Slave Labour Camps in the Soviet Union, in China? The claim to "Equality" in the face of the *nomenklatura?* The claim to "Freedom" in the face of the *millions* killed in Stalin's Russia and Mao's China? The claim to super-efficiency in the face of the total collapse of those economies?

The intellectuals developed a consequential skill, one that was of the greatest use to The Movement: the facility to explain away facts. This was specially so in countries like India, for in the Holy Lands themselves – the Soviet Union, China – no explanations had to be given. The purges in Soviet Russia? Just the aberration of an individual – Stalin. The wooden inefficiency of the country? Just the sclerosis of an individual – Brezhnev.... How the paranoia or stupor of one individual was able to affect an entire system when The Theory had insisted all along that the outcome is determined by architectonic factors such as the pattern of ownership of the Means of Production, and not by individuals – that was never explained. By mental jugglery the existing reality in societies such as ours was compared, not to the real condition of the Soviet societies – facts about that were either "shown" to be fabrications of capitalist propaganda, or temporary aberrations – but with the Utopia that the theorists had conjured. Why like should not be compared to like, how facts – which after Khruschev's speech to the Twentieth Congress were being acknowledged by the Soviets themselves – did not in actuality exist, these mundane things too were never explained.

In fact, the real skill, the one they perfected was to ensure that such questions never interrupted discourse. The old device – common to all totalitarian ideologies – was sharpened to exclude, not just questions but the questioners themselves: if a progressive asked such questions, that he was asking them itself proved that he had "crossed the barricade", that he had turned a *murtad,* an apostate, and so his questioning was obviously to an agenda, accordingly there was no need to pay any attention to it; if a non-progressive asked them, then they were questions from one who was a "sworn enemy" of the Emancipation of the Masses, they were from a *kafir* in any case, and therefore they were contaminants which were not to be allowed to get anywhere near the faithful.

No one talks of The Theory as The Theory of Everything now-a-days. In fact, nowhere outside India is The Theory talked of at all. The complete refutation of The Theory in practice by the collapse of the edifice which had been constructed to realise it – the Soviet States – too has been a setback.

In other parts of the world, that collapse has proved lethal for The Theory. But here in India it has been, to recall the expression from the textbook, just a setback. The progressives have turned their well-practised skills to other issues: from fabricating critiques of our tradition, history, religion, to waxing insistent on rights of some hitherto undiscovered microscopic group. Moreover, because they continue to occupy pivotal positions in media and the educational structure, they still remain the ones who determine which will be the experts whom the people will regard as authorities they should heed. The fount of poison has been capped, therefore, but there is enough poison circulating in the system to continue to disable us for a decade or two.

And this is where recent history offers – both warning as well as hope. The warning is that their baleful influence will take long to wane on its own: we must record the forecasts they made and how things have turned out in practice, we must puncture the pretensions of their Theory. And we must work out the details of the alternative ways – the tiny ways in which the problems may be alleviated: "one by one, little by little, again and again."

Intellectual history of the last eighty years shows that towards this objective the work of even a few goes a long way, that the work of a few unknown persons, of persons who are themselves soon forgotten, goes a long way. Of the contributors to *The God That Failed,* how many would be recognised today? And yet what a hole that single compilation had blown in the wall ! Of the contributors to *From Under the Rubble,* apart from Solzhenitsyn there is

not a name that we would have even heard of: and yet books like that one, typed out in stealth, copy by laborious copy, became an alternative State. In the years following the triumph of the Bolsheviks, the liberal tradition went into eclipse: the successes of planning were bandied about, even intellectual work about some other way of doing things was as good as abandoned. In his tribute to Ludwig von Mises, Professor Hayek listed the names of persons around whose work the liberal tradition was revived in Economics.[2] It is such a short list. Each of them working in isolation, neglected if not scorned by the mainline intellectuals. And how many from his list would even our economists recognise today: Edwin Cannan? Theodore Gregory? Arnold Plant? Frank H. Knight? Luigi Einaudi, later President of Italy? Walter Eucken? Even of von Mises, what do we remember except the "debate" in which, we were taught in college, he had been conclusively demolished by Oskar Lange? Of Hayek himself?

Yet their solitary labours are what laid the foundation for the ways of thought which have such decisive influence today throughout the world. They and their work are what 20th Century history has vindicated.

Thus: Walk On.

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[2]F. A. Hayek, "The transmission of the ideals of economic freedom," 1951, in F. A. Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics,* Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967, pp. 195-200.

Programmed to self-destruct

Going by Marxist Theory – which is taught to this day as Gospel in the bastions of the eminent scholars we have been getting to know, for instance in so many of our universities – the communist Revolution was to have occurred first in societies which had developed farthest along the capitalist path. The reason was that the Revolution was not something that was to be brought about by someone outside or elsewhere. It was to be the explosion, the overturning which factors inherent to, as well as internal to capitalist development were to cause. What happened in fact? The advanced capitalist economies learnt to handle the crises that struck them. More important, they developed structures and processes which ensured that the economies would continually elude the extremes which Marx had "demonstrated" would break things down. And such Revolutions as occurred – Russia in 1917, China in 1949 – did so in countries in which Capitalism had not even spread all that much, to say nothing of its having exhausted its creative potential – which was the point at which The Theory had said the Revolution would occur. The other "Revolutions" were even more of an embarrassment to The Theory: the installation of communist governments in every single country of East Europe, for instance, was the result of nothing but conquests and *pustschs* directed by an external power. Where the upheavals were brought about

from within, the groups that acted were ones which The Theory had consigned to somnolence: Marx had consigned peasants to being "sacks of potatoes" for ever, but they were the ones who were in the forefront of the Revolutions in China and Vietnam. Worse, they were impelled not by the factors which The Theory had said would ignite them – the concentration and centralisation of capital, the falling rate of profit, the herding of labour into larger and larger industrial agglomerations and its thereby acquiring increasingly militant "proletarian class consciousness" etc.. They were propelled by the very thing which The Theory had denounced as sheer "false consciousness", that is by plain old nationalism – against the Japanese in China, against the Japanese and then the French and then against the Americans and eventually against the Chinese in Vietnam.

A hundred years of evidence showing that things were not going in the direction which The Theory had insisted they would take should have led the faithful to re-examine The Theory. But once a theory becomes The Gospel, once it becomes the basis of a Religion, that things are going in the direction opposite to what The Theory had forecast leads to a repudiation not of The Theory, but of the facts. This is exactly what happened. An entire industry grew up devoted to reading new meanings into Marx's propositions about "value", about "surplus value" about what the rate was which was to fall, about what exactly he had meant by "capital", by "concentration", by "centralisation" about "capitalism" becoming "monopoly capitalism", about "breaking the imperialist chain at its weakest link", about "surrounding the capitalist metropolis with the countryside which were the colonies" – an industry inventing meanings for these concepts which would enable the faithful to maintain that what was unfolding was in fact in accordance with the forecasts. To this day these constructions are being taught to students in our universities.

But are the other sets for whom these eminences are

always speaking up, those who strain to read new meanings into the verses of the Quran and the *Hadis* on *jihad* – "These refer to only the internal struggle between good and evil" – not doing the same thing today? Instead of re-examining The Theory – in their case The Revelation – are they not trying to contrive new "meanings" – meanings that have somehow eluded their predecessors for 1400 years?

There is a warning in this, as well as a clue. The warning is that the moment a Book or a doctrine comes to be treated as The Revelation, the moment the faithful come to assume that all knowledge is in The Book or flows from it, that what is not in The Book or does not flow from it is not true or not useful – the standard position of the *ulema* about the Quran, for instance – from that moment that teaching becomes a shackle. As for the clue, just watch the faithful: when they begin adjusting facts to fit the corset of that Theory, it is done for.

The recent history of Marxism-Leninism furnishes other pointers also. First, like all Revelations the doctrine was reductionist in the extreme: *everything* – in the physical universe, in the economy, in social relations, in the psychology of individuals, in art and literature – was said to be an unfolding of matter according to an unvarying dialectic – a configuration generating its anti-thesis and the conflict between the two resulting in a new synthesis. Second, it legitimised the use of all means, as well as a totalitarian set up: originally designed to legitimise the use of force and deceit for the acquisition and control of the State apparatus, it soon encompassed thinking also – for the obvious reason that independent thinking is more lethal to such regimes than grenades. Finally, and just at the time it should have been reassessing its foundations in the light of new evidence, that is in 1917, the teaching – from being just a doctrine – became State Religion: entertaining a doubt about it became henceforth not the starting point of an inquiry, it became heresy. And as the doctrine had itself

legitimised the use of all means, and the totalitarian boot to achieve the Great Goal, as this Religion was in turn the one way, the only way to that Great Goal, using all means to stamp out heresy was not just legitimate, it was imperative in terms of The Theory itself. An exact correspondence to the case of other, older Revelations.

The consequences of these three factors taken together seem ridiculous to us today, we are scarcely able to believe that they could have occurred. But even a cursory glance at the Encyclopedias and tracts which were produced in the Soviet Union shows that the consequences were very real and all-encompassing till just the other day.

As Dialectical Materialism explained everything, Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity, for instance, were denounced for decades in the Soviet Union – not because some data had been discovered which controverted them, but because some inferences from them were said to controvert what followed from Dialectical Materialism. Soviet scientists could not resume working on them till the Relativity theories had been rescued – and this became possible not by showing that the theories were vindicated by later evidence, not by showing that whether or not they conformed to Dialectical Materialism was irrelevant to their validity, but by showing that it was possible to construe them in a manner which would not conflict with Dialectical Materialism !

The fate that befell Relativity demonstrates the other stultifying effect just as well. Is the universe finite and bounded as many a religious cosmology had implied? Or is it finite and unbounded as Einstein had said? You would settle the question by normal scientific methods. But in the Soviet Union scientists had to reckon with the fact that Lenin had happened to say in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* that the universe is infinite, and, what he had said being part of the canon, his statement could not but be taken to settle the question. Do space, time, matter have an

existence independent of one another or are the former two but manifestations of the latter? Soviet scientists till the late fifties could not assess what followed from, for instance, Einstein's theories on the question by itself. They had not just to reckon with, they had to uphold what Engels and Lenin had said on the relationship of the three – and this they had to do even though neither Engels nor Lenin had been a physicist or a philosopher, and even though neither had written any systematic work on time, space or matter !

Such was the consequence in fields so far removed from the subjects on which the prophets had focussed. Naturally, the consequence was much more severe for disciplines which happened to be closer to the subjects on which these oracles had written. For Marx interest was not just, it was not even primarily the price by which scarce capital was rationed between competing uses, it was an illegitimate amount which exploiters extract from the exploited. Using it to choose between technologies in one project or between investments in different sectors was, therefore, taboo in Soviet Planning. Capital, though in extreme scarcity, thus became a "free good" for the planners, with predictably disastrous consequences. But the taboo could not be broken. Economists and planners spent decades trying to fabricate surrogates – "Periods of Recoupment" and the rest – which would perform the same function: and we in Indian universities grew up memorising those surrogates as masterpieces of the creative development of Marxism-Leninism ! Similarly, as being guided by the market was taboo, there was little basis for setting prices of finished products; decades were accordingly spent trying to derive prices from Marx's propositions on value – on the "social labour" "congealed" in the respective commodities and the rest. The grotesque irrationalities and imbalances which resulted have since become common knowledge.

To see the exact parallel one has just to compare the

sophistries by which Soviet economists tried to inveigle interest back into the system in the face of these taboos with the sophistries by which Islamic law-givers try to this day to inveigle interest in the face of corresponding taboos in the Quran and the *Hadis*.

In such systems it is necessary to ensure that everything conforms to what the prophet had said. And it is sufficient to do so. And when the prophet has explained everything in terms of one *deus ex machina*, of just one cause – the materialist dialectic in this case – all subsequent inquiry is blocked. For a hundred years Marxist study of religions came to be confined to arriving at the same conclusions about every religion and ritual which Marx and Engels had set out in *The German Ideology* about Christianity. The insights of the Buddha into the working of the mind, the figure of faith which Jesus inspires, all have invariably ended up being reduced to half a dozen clichés. For seventy years Marxist literary criticism came to be confined to arriving at the same conclusions about every author – and later about every artist, and later still about every film maker – which Lenin had set out about Tolstoy. And these conclusions were simplistic in the extreme: to the extent that the writer portrays the ills of the existing arrangements he is making a contribution, went the critique; to the extent that, having done so, he falls short of concluding that nothing but the Proletarian Revolution is the answer, he is purblind. Marxist history-writing, as we have seen, is no different: every configuration is fitted into the corset of Marx's five stages, every occurrence is tracked down to the forces and relations of production, the same clichés are repeated *ad nauseum*, – "Brahmins depended on sacrifices," "Class-alliance of Brahmins and rulers," "Law as an instrument of the ruling class;" and, once that has been done, nothing else need be done. Except of course when it comes to explaining the cruelties and stagnation of Communist societies – then everything must be tracked down to the aberrations of one

Stalin or one Ceaucescu !!

Is what we are told about the ravages which were committed for centuries in the name of *jihad* any different? For centuries these ravages were the pride of the tradition, they were proof of the tradition being the special favourite of Allah, of the victors being the chosen of Allah. But today we are told that they were just the aberrations of individual rulers. How come that such a grievously wrong construction came to hold the ground for fourteen hundred years? The question the Left never answered was: you say everything is determined by the forces and relations of production, that the individual does not matter; how is it then that one Stalin could account for all that went wrong? The corresponding question in the case of what is sought to be explained away in Islamic history is: as everything happens by the will of Allah, as the Prophet himself had said, "My *ummah* will never agree upon an error," how come that for fourteen hundred years the faithful put a construction on the texts which was so totally wrong?

Once the doctrine has become a Revelation, creativity must wait upon the current heir and prophet – only a Lenin, having proclaimed all along that the Russian Revolution was the beginning of the World Revolution, can turn around and proclaim "Socialism in one country"; only a Stalin can proclaim that the analyses of Marx and Engels and Lenin are not edicts fixed forever; only a Mao can turn Marx's pronouncements about peasants on their head and still maintain that what he is doing is just the development of The Theory. Creativity must wait, that is, upon the sparkle or the compulsions of the current prophet. But he has but to proclaim his new, amended version and that too – as we saw most recently in the case of Mao in both China and India – gets congealed as the new, unalterable Gospel.

Furthermore, when a reductionist ideology becomes the State Religion, as happened in the case of Marxism-Leninism and as is the case today in every Islamic State, things get

even worse. As the ideology is the instrument which will usher in the glorious future, everything must not only be interpreted to conform to it, every interpretation must be an instrument of the future which the ideology is out to realise. Soviet and Chinese writings on Buddhism and Islam illustrate the matter. It was not just that the subtle insights of the Buddha were reduced to ashes, one thing was said about them one day and its opposite the next – according to what would suit the needs of the rulers. A glance at the relevant entries in any handy reference book – for instance, *The Encyclopedia of Marxism, Communism and Western Socialism* – nails the pattern. In 1917-27 the Soviet rulers needed to pacify Buddhists. Therefore, they extolled Buddhism as an ideology of the oppressed masses, they extolled it for what they said was its atheism, for its emphasis on equality; they saw in its monastic orders a forerunner of collectivisation – and naturally many an Indian progressive did the same as a consequence. After 1929 when crushing was in order, they portrayed Buddhism as having been an instrument created by feudal lords to keep the working masses in thrall. Once the stamping-out began, Stalin declared that it was "absurd" to "equate" Buddhism and Dialectical Materialism.

As instruments vary over time, the *Encylopedia* records, they vary over space. Thus it was perfectly in accord with The Theory for Chinese communists to denounce and exterminate Buddhism at home but to proclaim in Thervadin countries such as Sri Lanka and Burma that they were acting against only the Mahayana variant with its deism and its rituals. The writings on Islam, we learn from the same authorities, went through the same cycle. By the thirties and forties Soviet writers were portraying the Prophet and the Quran in dark, minatory colours – ridiculing accounts of miracles attributed to the Prophet, questioning not just the spiritual worth, not just the literary worth but even the coherence of the Quran. That *at that very time* the

Communists in India, whose mentors had written all this about these religions and their founders, should have been projecting themselves as the champions of the adherents of these very religions, too was perfectly in accord with The Theory.

This ability to adapt the ideology, to always find the proposition or variant which will serve the objective of the moment, seems very clever at first. But over time, everyone sees the somersaulting. Cynicism follows inevitably – about the claims that are being made on behalf of The Theory, total distrust of the ones who are making the claims.

These ideologies have a singular aim: to capture power, in particular the State. Once they do so, the ideology becomes not just a State Religion, it becomes the Religion of a totalitarian State. Whether a theory or a discovery will advance or sink comes to depend, therefore, not on its intrinsic merit, not even on whether or not it conforms to the canon, but on *who* is espousing it: is the person important in and to the Party or not? Many a climber in the Soviet Union did in a rival, many an opportunist advanced his career by putting the most far-fetched constructions on, and drawing wild inferences from the work of scholars, and showing that they were in conflict with the uni-causal ideology.

With this goes the related feature of ideologies that claim to be Revelations: as Dialectical Materialism claimed to be all-encompassing, to explain everything, the most far-fetched constructions could be put on the theory or writings of an individual in fields far away from his particular work, and yet be fatal: physicists were done in, not because what they said conflicted with something that Engels or Lenin had said on *physics*, but because what they were saying on a *question of physics* could, if interpreted to mean such and thus, yield a conclusion in regard to *social organisation* which went against the official view. And in such encounters under such regimes the verdict that counts – on the scientific

validity of, say, The Theory of Relativity as much as on these projections of what the implications will be for social organisation – is not that of the community of scientists but of the Party hatchets.

The fate of genetics is a notorious example. Communism, all the prophets proclaimed, will create the New Man. This was certain, they said, because man's nature is a result of environment. By overturning the means and relations of production Communism is changing the environment. Therefore, the new Soviet Man is a certainty. A remark or two of Marx could be cited to show that he too had subscribed to this view. And Stakhanov in the Soviet Union was living proof, as were the Red Guards later in China, that the new regime was indeed giving birth to the New Man. Now, the work of several geneticists, specially Mendel, called into question the premise that acquired characteristics are passed on to succeeding generations. The *Encyclopedia* recounts that a simple-minded "practical" plant breeder, I. V. Michurin, came up with "results" to show that the characteristics of plants could not only be altered by changing the environment, the altered characteristics would be inherited by subsequent generations. Lenin took a fancy for him – because his results accorded with the new optimism, because he was a Russian, and a Communist and a "practical nursery man" to boot. One of the most notorious operators in the history of science, Lysenko seized upon the ideas, and, by Lenin's and then Stalin's patronage became the czar and terror of these branches of science. By 1949 Mendelian genetics was outlawed and leading geneticists of the country were made to recant their earlier work, and to denounce themselves for having even sought to build on Mendelian results. This single, mediocre man stifled two entire sciences, the *Encyclopedias* record, caused disasters in Soviet agriculture for three full decades, and became a byword for terror among scientists.

The only reason that we in India have not had a Lysenko

is that the Communists have not had control over the entire country, and that we have remained an open society. But the "non-violent" pressures in several of our universities, the networking and blackballing have been just as fatal to creativity and independent thinking. One has only to see the blight in the History and the Economics departments of our Left-controlled universities.

And the sequence is inevitable: there is the reductionist Revelation; every proposition which can be advanced as something which is substantiating this Revelation is *ipso facto* true, every fact or argument which may call the Revelation in question is by definition untrue; and the Party hatchet, the cleric is the one who will decide whether the proposition advances The Cause or not – after all, it is the Party which, it is the *ulema* who alone understand the Revelation, it is the Party, the cleric who alone is truly committed to it. Moreover, it is the duty of the Party, of the *ulema* to safeguard and vindicate the Revelation, and to make sure that it prevails all across the globe. Anyone who refuses to accept it must be put out – for he is blocking the March of History, he is impeding the Will of Allah. So, the Party, the faithful are perfectly justified in using all means.

The Party apart, this "religiofication" of the ideology cannot but smother creative work. After all, what is the necessary condition for scholarship when an ideology or Line has been exalted to such status? That everything one digs up and writes confirms that Theory and Line. And it is sufficient to do so. That is what we see in the textbooks we have encountered. The sole concern of the authors is to adduce "evidence", to come up with some inference and "interpretation" which substantiates The Theory. And the moment some fragment of a text, some contrived inference has been pushed, some "interpretation" imagined which does so, the work is done !

This rule of necessity-and-sufficiency is enough by itself to kill innovative work. All that the scholar has to do is to

bring his study every few pages to reiterate some element of the dogma, to "validate" some sentence or proposition from some book of some master theoretician — the only care he has to exercise is to make sure that the theoretician is still in the good books of the canonisers. And the more often our scholar repeats the proposition in his study, the more of a theoretician he becomes in his own right.

Thus, as we have seen, in the Introduction to his *Ancient India,* D.N. Jha asserts:

> "....Religious rituals and practices underwent considerable change. *Bhakti* (devotion), which reflected the complete dependence of the serfs or tenants on the landowners in the context of Indian feudal society, became the essential ingredient of religion...."[1]

Just an assertion, no proof. After all, this is just the *Introduction*. A hundred pages later the assertion is still an assertion, but it acquires more body in that it gets an entire paragraph to itself and not just a sentence!

> "The doctrine of *bhakti,* clearly enunciated first in the *Gita* and a vital force in Vaishnavism and Shaivism, became socially more relevant in the Gupta period. It preached that one could obtain final liberation only through devotion to and faith in god, and not just by performing sacrifices. God was made accessible to everybody through *bhakti.* This new form of piety was in tune with the social outlook of the times, when the feudatories considered themselves as meditating at the feet of their masters. This explains the new stress on the doctrine of *bhakti* in Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and to a degree in Mahayana Buddhism."[2]

The causal connection between feudalism and *bhakti* is

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[1]D. N. Jha, *Ancient India,* Manohar, New Delhi, 1997, p. xviii.
[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 106-07.

taken to be one of those self-evident truths, and asserted without any evidence. Why sub-lords, who were in the position of "meditating at the feet of their masters", should promote or even countenance a doctrine which makes the super-lord accessible directly to every serf and tenant is left unexplained — presumably as an exercise for the reader! The sequence in such scholarship is not that some evidence — some secret text, for instance — has been discovered in which some sage has set out the uses of *bhakti* for the lords, his feudatories and the rest; and independently evidence has been discovered which establishes that, around the period when this text was composed, society was transiting to a feudal arrangement. The sequence is that The Theory has proclaimed that societies transit through feudalism. That therefore scraps of "evidence" are snatched which can be used to assert that the period, say the Gupta period, was one in which feudalism had come to prevail. A doctrine is then held up as helping perpetuate that feudalism!

The assertion gains instant acclaim as it is a repetition of what some theoretical-ancestor has said! In this case, D. D. Kosambi himself!! But when we read Kosambi we see that he himself had just strung together a string of assertions, and thus built a Theory about the *Gita*! As an exercise count the number of assertions Kosambi strings together in advancing his "Theory" when, in his essay on the scripture, he writes,

"Thus, the *Gita* was a logical performance for the early Gupta period, when expanding village settlement brought in new wealth to a powerful central government. Trade was again on the increase, and many sects could obtain economic support in plenty....

"To sum up, writing the *Gita* was possible only in a period when it was not absolutely necessary. [Why?] Samkara could not do without the intense polemic of theological controversy. To treat all views tolerantly and to merge them into one implies that the crisis in the means of production is not too acute.

Fusion and tolerance become impossible when the crisis deepens, when there is not enough of the surplus product to go around, and the synthetic method does not lead to increased production. Marrying the gods to goddesses had worked earlier because the conjoint society produced much more after differences between matriarchal and patriarchal forms of property were thus reconciled. The primitive deities adopted into Siva's or Visnu's household helped enlist food-gathering aboriginals into a much greater food-producing society. The alternative would have been extermination or enslavement, each of which entailed violence with excessive strain upon contemporary production. The vedic Aryans who tried naked force had ultimately to recombine with the autochthonous people. The *Gita* might help reconcile certain factions of the ruling class. Its inner contradictions could stimulate some exceptional reformer to make the upper classes admit a new reality by recruiting new members. But it could not possibly bring about any fundamental change in the means of production [Notice the assumption — that this was the task of the scripture —from which follows the failure!], nor could its fundamental lack of contact with reality and disdain for logical consistency promote a rational approach to the basic problems of Indian society.

"However, the *Gita* did contain one innovation which precisely fitted the needs of a later period : *bhakti*, personal devotion [Note the word *'later'*: thus, in this account the invention of *bhakti precedes* the development of feudalism!]. To whoever composed that document, *bhakti* was the justification, the one way of deriving all views from a single divine source. As we have seen from the demand for the quite insipid *Anu-Gita* sequel, this did not suffice in its own day. But with the end of the great centralised personal empires in sight, Harsa's being the last — the new state had to be feudal from top to bottom. The essence of fully developed feudalism is the chain of personal loyalty which binds retainer to chief, tenant to lord, and baron to king or emperor. Not loyalty in the abstract but with a secure foundation in the means and relations of production : land ownership, military service, tax-collection and the conversion of local produce into commodities through the magnates. This system was certainly not possible before the end of the 6th century AD.... The further development of

feudalism 'from below' meant a class of people at the village level who had special rights over the land (whether of cultivation, occupation, or hereditary ownership) and performed special armed service as well as service in tax-collection. To hold this type of society and its state together, the best religion is one which emphasises the role of *bhakti,* personal faith, even though the object of devotion may have clearly visible flaws."[3]

The sequence is exactly the one noticed earlier. It is assumed that everything, including scriptures setting out different paths into inner realisation, is the product of the pattern of ownership of the means of production, and this pattern in turn has its roots in the stage that technology has reached. From these two assumptions, it is "proved" that a particular scripture, or a particular notion in that particular scripture, serves the purpose of a particular arrangement! How fragile this method of reasoning is will be evident from considering the very example that Kosambi gives, and Jha repeats. *Bhakti* is just one of the paths in the Gita. What about the *Gyan marga?* That is as central to the Gita as *bhakti* : does the *Gyan marga* also serve the needs of the feudal lord and his feudatories? What about the emphasis in the Gita on *karma,* on doing things oneself, on the assurance that no effort shall be wasted, the insistence that one must fight wrong and injustice — which of these would be comforting to a feudal order?

Consider *bhakti* itself. Jha says that it was characteristic of *Mahayana Buddhism* also. That branch flourished most and lasted longest in Tibet : was the economic, social and political order of Tibet also feudal? Had the means of production and the pattern of their ownership in Tibet remained the same till the 1950s as they were in the India of the Gupta period?

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[3]D. D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality,* Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1962, 1983 reprint, pp. 29-32.

Consider the great revival of *bhakti* during the period of Islamic rule in India — the revival that occurred because of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, of Surdas, of Kabir, of Nanak, of Tulsidas. Did this occur also because the arrangements were feudal and the Islamic rulers wanted to buttress these arrangements by coming to some further "mephistophelian bargains" with these seers? Or was it the other way round – that, seeing the onslaught of Islam and the pace at which the population was succumbing to force and thereby getting converted to Islam, these seers, by emphasizing devotion to a personal god, stemmed the tide of Islam in India?

And what about the reformers and leaders who stood India on its feet in the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century? What were, say Aurobindo, Tilak, Gandhi doing when they attached such pivotal importance to the Gita? Were they also buttressing feudalism?

Indeed, Islam demands devotion to the Prophet much more emphatically than does the *Bhakti marga* to any personal god. Is one to conclude from this that the set up in 7th century Arabia was similar to the "feudalism" of the Gupta period in India, and that the insistence of Islam that followers be totally devoted to the Prophet was also in aid of some feudal design?

The effect on the reader and student of the assertion-dressed-up-as-proposition is predictable, especially in an educational system such as ours which places total store on "learning" by rote. Having come across the same assertion in book after book, in chapter after chapter of a book, by the time he graduates the student has internalised the notion. The next time he encounters it, he does not ask for proof. He takes the assertion to be a proposition, and the proposition to be a self-evident truth, a truth which has been proven for ages.

This helps perpetuate that proposition, and The Theory which strings such propositions together. But it is fatal for scholarship. To start with, there is The Theory as revealed

to Marx and Engels. All that Kosambi has to do is to locate some Indian examples which fit into that Theory — and as we are talking of thousands of years ago, no comprehensive proof is required, – a bit here, a scrap there will do : that only a handful of coins of the period have been discovered, a designation of an office of State which had not been encountered in some earlier text, a verse or two in a text containing hundreds and hundreds of other verses. Kosambi has just to point to these and the Theory is once again validated, and Kosambi's repute as a leading theoretician and historian is established. And all that the latterly eminent Jha has to do is to repeat what Kosambi said.

For each of the scholars to do this much is necessary of course, but it is also sufficient. And that is why Indian historical scholarship, like its counterpart in, say, Marxist economic writing in our universities has been going round and round in the same groove for decades.

In a word, The Theory is programmed to self-destruct: that is a reason for hope. But in the meanwhile it will smother creativity, it will, as we have seen from the example of our eminent historians, shield charlatanry: reasons enough, as Lenin might have said, for giving history a helping-hand !

The pattern of consequences

These eminent historians are but an example. But their Line is the general Line, the one which the entire lot of progressives has been insinuating into our discourse.

That Line has had disastrous consequences. Seldom has our society been in as confused a condition as it is today. The whole – India – has been called so much in question, every objective has been exalted so much to be at par with every other objective – the human rights of the terrorist with the survival of the country – that often even those who man offices of the State are not sure that they would be right to save the whole.

Four features of the discourse these worthies have spawned are particularly injurious, and therefore ones which we must urgently reverse.

"Rights-talk" is all we hear: education, employment, houses, old-age pensions for agricultural workers, separate personal laws in perpetuity, food at subsidised prices, uneconomically low bus fares, water and electricity rates, privacy, homosexuality, promiscuity.... have all by now been claimed and promised as rights. The list gets longer by the day, and *inevitably* so: on the one hand, the person who is aiming to set himself up as a leader of a section must conjure up something that he can demand as a right for the group; on the other, the party or leader wanting to garner the support or votes of that group must promise to make good

that claim.

Moreover, as Amitai Etzioni and others have emphasised,[1] the claim having been put forth as a right, all argument and reasoning is automatically ruled out: anyone who questions the claim, anyone who even says that, while the claim is good in the abstract, society cannot afford to concede it at the moment – anyone who says, for instance, that, while the poor certainly need rice at prices they can afford, giving it today at subsidised prices will bankrupt the State – becomes by definition *against the poor,* he becomes one who is *refusing to recognise their right to live.* Next, as the claim is a right of the group or person, it follows that it is legitimate to bend the State or the rest of society *by all possible means* into conceding it. In India this has graduated over the years into the premise that if the right is not conceded immediately, the group has a right to bring the system to a halt – to *jam* the *chakkas,* to disrupt classes, to prevent the legislature from proceeding with the listed business....

The assertion of the right then impinges not just on the rights of others, it disables the system itself which must function well for any of the rights to be fulfilled. There are consequences for the particular right itself, as well as for the group in whose name that right was pushed. All too often, what starts as a demand for rectifying a wrong ends up disrupting what is irreplaceable: the right to a quick divorce in the West started as a device to enable women to liberate themselves from unworkable marriages, it has become one of the factors responsible for undermining the institution of the family itself. The same holds for groups: the "rights" wrested in the name of Muslims, of Yadavs have ignited a mighty reaction.

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[1]Etzioni's book is indeed apposite for Indians, Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community : Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Idea,* Fontana, 1995.

The consequences are compounded, Etzioni and others point out, by the fact that rights-talk is invariably accompanied by "wronged-talk", by talk of the wrongs to which the group has been subjected. Indeed, persons who are trying to work up a group find that instilling in its members the notion that it has been wronged is much more potent, and therefore far more useful than persuading them that there are rights which are their due. Here too the same lengthening of the list is inevitable. Among the persons who are trying to get the group behind them a competition ensues to discover wrongs, it soon leads to their exaggerating such wrongs as exist, soon to inventing wrongs. Recall the sequence through which the rhetoric of the competing Akali politicians passed during the '60s and '70s, and the climax in which it ultimately ended: of Bhindranwale insisting that the Sikhs had been reduced to being slaves in India, and declaring that anyone who did not see that this was so was by definition anti-Sikh.

The entire politics of that group comes to revolve around this competitive grievance-mongering. It becomes not just a right to hate, an author correctly observes, it becomes *right* to hate. The degree to which one has worked up in oneself hatred towards others, the certainty with which one has convinced oneself that the system is not just crushing one's group, but that it is going to go on doing so forever, becomes the measure of one's fidelity to the cause. Eventually the sequence recoils on the group itself: it warps the self-image and psychology of the group on the one hand, and on the other it poisons relations of the group with the rest of society – recall where Muslims have been led by this kind of talk over the last hundred years. In his important study, *Indian Muslims, Need for a Positive Outlook*, Maulana Wahiduddin shows, how, worked up and eventually caught up in these notions, Indian Muslims have become in the eyes of others "a problem group", "a nuisance group". In turn this perception handicaps the group

in all subsequent dealings.[2] Just as important, that kind of mind-set leads the group to sink into the notion that its condition has been caused by the eternal hostility of *others* rather than by the fact that *it* is not putting in the requisite effort to rise to a higher level: Muslims do not see that the factor which most accounts for the disadvantaged condition of which they complain is their having listened to leaders who kept them away from acquiring the education and skills which modern occupations require. At first this is a comforting alibi, in the end it proves fatal.

Society too is disrupted and set back, and not just by these two facts – that a large group sinks into a self-satisfied sulk and thereby stops exerting to improve its position, and the fact that inter-group relations in society are poisoned. Groups develop a vested interest in insisting that they are being done in – look at the insistence of the champions of the disadvantaged castes that they be called "*Dalits*", look at the insistence of even dominant castes – Yadavs, Jats, Vokkaligas, Lingayats – that they be declared to be "*Backward* Castes." This insistence, which starts as a device to fill others with guilt, soon engenders in the rest, not guilt and therefore a sense of responsibility, but resentment.

On the other side, once it has internalised the notion that it is being done down by the perfidy of others, the group proceeds to the premise that it has a right to behave in any way it likes. The apologists – the "progressives" – fortify the group in this belief. Look at the way the aggressiveness of Mulayam Singh, the boorishness of Laloo Yadav, the opportunism of Kanshi Ram are all sought to be explained away as being the natural, indeed legitimate expression of groups "which have been long suppressed and are at last coming into their own."

In the beginning this sort of conduct is limited to specifics,

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[2]Al-Risala Books, New Delhi, 1993.

as is its rationalisation. But soon it translates into a pervasive debasement – for the process does not stop at questioning some particular standard, and demanding, for instance, that it be made less culture- or class-specific. The notion of standards itself, of norms is soon denounced as being nothing but a device which the advantaged have forged to perpetuate their hegemony: recall the denunciation, indeed the repudiation of the very notion of "merit" during and as a result of the debate on Reservations. This is ruinous in itself: for no society can survive without adhering to norms and standards. Worse, the process does not stop at this either. Soon the system of which the notion of standards and norms is a part is itself denounced and repudiated: V.P. Singh panics as Devi Lal calls a rally; to pre-empt the rally, he announces reservations; when the question of merit is raised, he declares, "But where is the merit in the system itself which keeps millions down?" ; the words are ruinous enough when used by a demagogue such as him, but, such is the power of populist sloganeering that soon enough judges of the Supreme Court deciding the Reservation cases quote those catastrophic words with approbation....

The abandonment of standards in one sphere swiftly spreads to affairs of the society in general. The malignancy which was introduced by rights-talk becomes final and fatal. Recall that, because the demand was posited as a right, it was put beyond reason, beyond a calculus of the costs of meeting it. Now that the claim to that right has been fortified by the notion that the group has been wronged, that the system is such and the perfidy of the advantaged is such that the group can never expect to secure "justice", the group feels free to use all means. Intimidation? Allying with and deploying criminals? Violence? The group can deploy each of them. Orderly conduct of affairs of State and society, indeed orderly life itself is the casualty.

Consequences such as these plague us at every turn today, and each of them brings home the lessons which Gandhiji

laboured to teach us. We need changes in structure of course, so that conduct more conducive to the general good will become natural, that it will be rewarded and its reverse penalised. But in addition, in fact to enable the changes in structure to be brought about we need to change the balance of discourse.

After fifty years of rights-talk and of trying to meet the claims of all groups – of protecting small industries one year, of channeling funds to backward districts the next, of extending Reservations to this group today and that one tomorrow – several lessons are evident. First, in a sense every right is legitimate, but in a society at a particular time only a few of these can be met, and that too only to a limited extent. It can be argued that each of us in India is entitled to the standard of living and social security net which the Swedes have: but our country, placed as it is today, just cannot afford to provide these.

Second, times change, and the extent to which a right is conceded has to be calibrated accordingly, often because of the tendencies which conceding that right has itself set in motion: decades ago it was generally felt that trade unions did not have opportunity enough to get employers heed the rights of workers; laws upon laws were passed and enforced so that the conditions in which workers had to labour would be hygienic, so that workers would have some protection against the whims and arbitrariness of employers; but several controllers of labour turned trade unions into instruments of blackmail, into instruments for aggrandising their personal power rather than for furthering the interests of their members; security of tenure has also been pushed to such extremes that it has become impossible to halt disruptive conduct. Therefore, the point is not that the unions should never have been given any quarter, nor that workers should be left completely to the whim of employers, but that the balance having tilted too far in one direction, a few weights need to be added now to the other side of the

scales.

Third, conceding a right has consequences beyond that right: a series of judgments and laws recognised and enforced a particular right of workers in public sector enterprises, the right to be secure in their jobs. The effect of these rulings extended far beyond this right – they have been among the principal contributors to the general inefficiencies which hobble those enterprises, and have therefore set the country back. Fourth, societies invariably grow unevenly: at every stage some individuals, some groups, some regions leap ahead, others are left behind; in fact, many are not able to get what they most manifestly deserve, even need in their life-time. Fifth, attempts to hasten the process beyond a point invariably recoil on society, even on the group; and anyone – Lenin, Stalin, Mao, to say nothing of our pretenders here – who promises either that he will ensure all things, or even the basic things to everyone equally, or in a hurry is just using the slogans to acquire power, and he will in the end inflict unimagined costs on society – Lenin and Stalin with their millions killed, Mao with his millions killed.

Finally, while every society has on occasion to concede the demand of a group because it has acquired muscle, each time it concedes a demand on this calculation, it is teaching other groups to acquire muscle, and adopt the same intimidatory strategies. Soon enough it will either have to dig in its heels and reverse what in its weakness it has made the norm – and the longer it has been bending to such groups, the greater the force which halting further concessions will require; or the society will plunge itself into bankruptcy and breakdown: bending before every union of municipal staff and turning the blind eye as they neglect their tasks leads soon enough to epidemics as residents of Delhi are learning today; the landslides upon landslides which have followed each Pay Commission ....

The moral is plain: We must tilt away from rights-talk

towards the responsibilities we have to discharge. Each claim must be set against the effects it will have on the rights of others – before conceding the "right" to a group to blare away over loudspeakers on the claim that these are days of one of its religious festivals, one must set this against the fact that the blaring assaults others who may be, say, wanting to meditate at that time. Even more important, the demand for a right must be set against the effects it will have on the ability of the whole to continue to function – on occasion a demand may have to be conceded and its consequences mopped up subsequently just to keep a group from repudiating the whole, at other times granting it may well trigger the disintegration of the whole. The means which a group uses to wrest its demands must certainly be put to this evaluation: anyone who takes a gun in his hand must be reckoned to have forfeited the protection of law, he must be dealt with by the rules of war; correspondingly, anyone who commences a *satyagraha* must be held to Gandhiji's conditions for *satyagrahis*.

Leaders of the group are quick to enumerate the benefits which will accrue to it by wresting the concession, and how the group can no longer do without the benefits. Even where the assertions of the leaders in this regard are valid, the benefits must also be scrutinised to discern the effects that conceding the "right" will have on the willingness and ability of this particular group to exert in ways which the efficient functioning of the whole requires: when you give persons the feeling that a particular job and promotions in it are their right and not things for which they must strive and excel, you knock out an important impetus for them to put in their best.

Discourse has to shift from what society owes us to the responsibilities we must discharge. The frequency with which epidemics are breaking out reminds us that each individual must discharge these responsibilities whether others are discharging them or not – each must deposit the

garbage from his house in the designated place, he must rid his own surroundings of stagnant water whether others are doing so or not. While one of the responsibilities the individual must discharge is to help goad and nudge the whole to perform its functions better, the responsibilities that fall to a person's lot have to be discharged whether or not his doing so will induce or impel the whole – in this case the municipality – to function better: for there is no level of efficiency at which the municipalities can function and rid the city of epidemics if individuals in it are going to continue with their unhygienic ways.

This was one of the principal teachings of Gandhiji: from clamouring for rights – which are a demand on *the other* – personified in the ultimate analysis by the State – we must shift to *making demands on ourselves*: instead of focussing on what others must do to end the discrimination of Harijans, he taught that the Harijans – in particular, their leaders – must focus on what the *Harijans* must do to lift themselves; correspondingly, the advantaged, instead of focussing on the many ways in which the Harijans – by addiction of the men-folk to liquor, by not exerting to educate their children – are contributing to their condition, must focus on what the advantaged have to do to create the conditions which will enable the Harijans to raise themselves.

Just as vital are two other types of talk of which we have seen such surfeit in our progressives, and which also need to be stood on their head.

Caste is real. The working class is real. Being a Naga is real. But "India is just a geographical expression" ! Similarly, being a Muslim of course is real – Islam must be seen and talked of as one block of granite – no matter that Shias and Sunnis the world over, Barelvis and Deobandis in U.P., Punjabis and Bengalis in erstwhile Pakistan, and Mohajirs, Sindhis and Punjabis in Pakistan today are at each others' throats. But Hinduism? Why, there is no such thing: it is

just an aggregation, a pile of assorted beliefs and practices – see, some of them put a vertical mark on their foreheads, others a horizontal one. And anyone who maintains anything to the contrary is a fascist out to insinuate a unity, indeed to impose a uniformity, where there has been none. That is what our progressive ideologues declaim, as we have seen.

In a word, the parts alone are real. The whole is just a construct. India has never been one, these ideologues insist – disparate peoples and regions were knocked together by the Aryans, by the Mughals, by the British for purposes of Empire. Anyone who wants to use that construct – India – as the benchmark for determining the sort of structure under which we should live has a secret agenda – of enforcing Hindu hegemony.

This is the continuance of, in a sense the culmination of the Macaulay-Missionary technique. The British calculated that to subjugate India and hold it, they must undermine the essence of the people: this was Hinduism, and everything which flowed from it. Hence the doggedness with which they set about to undermine the faith and regard of the people for five entities: the gods and goddesses the Hindus revered; the temples and idols in which they were enshrined; the texts they held sacred; the language in which those texts and everything sacred in that tradition was enshrined and which was even in mid-19th century the *lingua franca* – that is, Sanskrit; and the group whose special duty it had been over ions to preserve that way of life – the Brahmins. The other component of the same exercise was to prop up the parts – the non-Hindus, the regional languages, the castes and groups which they calculated would be the most accessible to Missionaries and The Empire – the innocent tribals, the untouchables.[3]

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[3]For illustrative texts, see my *Missionaries in India,* ASA, 1994, and HarperCollins, 1997.

Marxists were in the same business – of conversion. For their outlandish dreams to be realised it was just as essential that the people lose faith in, and regard for, that they cut themselves off from their roots. Having swallowed the denunciatory writings of Marx and Lenin, having convinced themselves that the vehemence with which one abused one's people, their past, their ways was the measure of the extent to which one had liberated oneself, that it was the measure of one's commitment to The Cause, these progressives did not just carry forward the denunciations which the Missionaries had set afoot, they did so with redoubled vehemence. And there was also the alluring prospect of garnering followers once sections could be worked up to feel that they were the exploited ones. Each "minority" was a natural for this propaganda. No wonder the Communists were so ready to "see justice" in the demand for Pakistan.

Two sets perpetuated and completed the task: the Socialists and the Secularists. The former were not being able to get a toe-hold in or against the Congress, in part because it had long since stolen their slogans. Their theoreticians saw that their only hope lay in casteism – but to base oneself on this, manifestly regressive platform, required some elaborate camouflage. They found a truly Gobbelsian cover – they declared that they were mobilising castes to destroy casteism ! The Secularists were doubly goaded to continue the same focus on parts. For one thing, it was the best way to garner votes: in each part of the country, and in the country as a whole, work up fears in the minorities – the non-Assamese in the North-East, the Muslims in India as a whole – and then present yourselves as the only available saviours. For another, the leaders, as well as the intellectual class which became dominant because of their patronage, were truly the products of Trevelyan and Macaulay – they had been wholly cut off from the tradition, they had internalised every canard which the Missionaries had sought to plant, they were outsiders.

These are the groups which have determined the tenor and content of discourse: the essence of which is to deny the whole and insist that only the parts are real. But as this talk is accompanied by rights-talk and the insistence that the part has been wronged, on the ground that the whole is not fulfilling the claim which that particular group is espousing, each group denounces the whole, it is taught to do so by its leaders. Just recall the rhetoric of the various groups of activists today: because Naxalites are not being left free to kill and intimidate others, because the demand on Narmada is not being conceded...., the entire system of governance, indeed India as we know it is unjust, it is irremediably unjust, and therefore illegitimate. As such it has no *locus* to claim anything from us. That is the reasoning.

This delegitimisation, and ultimate repudiation itself becomes the pattern: it comes to affect all aggregates, all levels. Etzioni and others set out the sequence which has already disrupted the West. The community is not legitimate, the family is. The family is not legitimate, only the individual is – the family is declared to be an instrument of decentralised authoritarianism, the obligations it entails, of parents towards children, of the latter to look after their ageing parents, of spouses towards each other, are now declared to be shackles which prevent the individual from "realising his full potential". Soon enough, and predictably so, the individual himself is dismissed as an abstraction – the only thing real is his impulse, his desire of the moment. Instant gratification, self-indulgence are taken to be, they are aggressively proclaimed to be self-actualisation, first as being necessary for creativity and soon as creativity itself.

This is the dominant ideology for many in the West, and its consequences – in the breakdown of family life, in the inability of society to find an argument against even the most extreme indulgence, for instance the unlimited access to guns – are well known. But this is exactly the world-view which so many of our newer publications in India embody,

which so many of our celebrities revel in flaunting: "Couples that are faithful to each other," one of the most widely read authors told my wife and me the other day, "are *so boring*."

The whole has been completely decompounded, and therefore no obligation it entails remains worth a second thought. No society, certainly not one as hard-pressed as ours can survive a hollowing-out of this sort.

The balance of discourse must shift back towards the whole. Whatever we do as individuals, our survival, certainly our fulfillment requires the proper functioning of the whole – of the system of governance, of inter-personal and social relations. Accordingly, the obligations which the proper functioning of the whole entails are to be viewed not as intrusions or shackles, but as duties that are vital for the survival and flowering of the individual himself, much as banks are what enable a river to flow. The prevalent fashion of each part denouncing the whole because the latter is not able at that moment to fulfill some particular claim of that group must be replaced by the realisation that the country has an existence, a validity independent of each part; that the health and efficient functioning of the whole are necessary for the well-being of each component; that, as not just I but others also suffer when I neglect to clear stagnant water in and around my house, everyone else has a right to demand that I fulfill the responsibilities which the health of the whole requires.

A particular responsibility which each of us owes to the whole is to regulate our conduct in ways which the proper functioning of institutions requires. The last fifty years teach us that we cannot proceed on the assumption that each of us, being so minuscule a part of the whole, can leave the care of the institutions to others and do as we will, or must – we cannot proceed on the premise that institutions will remain honest or that others will keep them honest even as we as individuals continue to pay and receive the bribes that we do, or have to. Institutions, no less than our bodies

and minds, have to be nourished and attended to – every day, forever: "one by one, little by little, again and again".

Accordingly, the least each of us has to do, as the *Dhammapada* would put it, is to "Desist from evil, learn to do good," at the least to desist from transgressing laws and doing what is manifestly wrong. How many of our problems would be lessened if as individuals we did no more than adhered to the law. Recently I had to rush to and from a hospital in the evenings as a relative, dear to all of us lay ill. On three successive evenings the cars were backed up over half a kilometer. Each time the cause was the same: even though vehicles would be lined up to the edge of the intersection, someone would decide to wade into the intersection; the traffic signals would change before he had been able to clear the intersection; vehicles would pour in from the perpendicular road; and everyone would be in everyone's way; tempers would rise, someone would try to make a break and hurl his vehicle in the lane coming towards one on the right; and then there would be place neither to go ahead nor to reverse.... We blame governments and judges for the interminable delays in courts; but is it not a fact that in every case it is one side which deliberately delays matters – because it knows that it is in the wrong, because it expects to wear the adversary down? But how will these modes of conduct change if, from Class III onwards the child is taught that laws and institutions are just devices which "the vested interests" have forged to perpetuate their hegemony?

The rule implies more: that each of us must see himself first as a part of the whole: a journalist is first and last a citizen; the publication is just an instrument to which he has access at the moment to help ensure that the whole advances. Similarly, the norms of each profession must be assessed in the light of their effects on the whole: "I am bound to defend anyone who approaches me for assistance," says the lawyer to justify shielding a crook or smuggler; but when the skills of the best legal brains in the country are

going to be available to crooks and smugglers on this rationalisation and the prosecution is to be led by ill-paid, ill-equipped counterparts, how can we expect the whole to survive?

Even doing that much – desisting from evil, abiding by laws – will take care of so many of the problems we create for each other. But it will not be enough: in addition we must spare time and skill to rehabilitate some one institution. Those who have the wherewithal and skills must put them to work on behalf of the institution – and so must the ones who are directly affected by its malfunctioning, that is the victims. Gandhiji made this specific: he taught that the best thing the ones with the necessary wherewithal and skills could do was to enable and equip the victims to set right the particular thing which was holding them down.

In view of what we have been seeing in the last fifty years three things specially need to be done. The essential strategy of politics in the last years has been to string together and work up components, "minorities" to overwhelm the whole, the "majority". At each level, on every issue politics needs to aim at mobilising the "majority" – the largest number must be got to vote, the silent majority must be mobilised to register their say on Narmada.

Second, when a group claims to be disadvantaged, persecuted, "backward" it must be held to specifying the particular disability by which it is handicapped. And the remedy should be addressed to alleviating that specific disability. The group which, because of some specific disability, begins denouncing the whole – the complex of arrangements which enables it to demand and secure redress in the first place – must be looked upon with the same wariness as the group which resorts to unconstitutional means. While the rest of society should shore up that particular deficiency, the group and its leaders must be required to conform to norms, they must meet the standards which the task requires, the standards up to which others

are being asked to perform.

Third, while there is no doubt that even the effort of a solitary individual will be a force for the good, given the way the whole has been delegitimised, as the Communitarians in the U.S. have been urging, it is essential that we engage in tasks which are best done *with* others. Every day we read of some elderly couple being clubbed to death: if the youth of the neighbourhood would make it their business to visit the elderly couples of the colony, help them assess their security devices and help them obtain better ones, they would be solving a specific problem – in this case, literally saving lives – and they would simultaneously be helping restore what was so marked a feature of our society: the sense of community and neighbourhood. Ever so many times it has turned out that terrorists who planted bombs and killed scores had but recently rented a flat in some colony. Ever so often we read that the elderly couple were killed by the servant they had hired a few days earlier. Were the youth of the colony to help register all new tenants and all servants with the neighbourhood police *thana*, they would be saving lives, they would be restoring that sense of community, they would be restoring the sense of possibilities – that, yes, even today a handful can make a difference.

To restore the primacy of the whole, to have us adhere to rules and norms, enforcement by external agencies is of course a must – as in India today the custodians of law have made a business of fattening themselves by violating it, almost the first thing that needs to be done is for others to enforce the law on them. But an entire society cannot be policed, for, when repudiation of values becomes as pervasive as it has in India, the enforcers will themselves require to be watched. The society can function only if for the overwhelming proportion of people rule-abidingness becomes an internal impulse. The progressive integration of the economy, our being packed tighter and tighter in

cities will ultimately provide a new basis for adhering to rules, for keeping our word. They will provide a new basis for ethics, new pressures for doing our duty: neglect by one will injure larger and larger numbers, so they will step in and insist that each discharges his responsibility; if a person – the supplier of components, say – does not keep to the agreed date, the producer will switch to some other supplier. There are correctives afoot, therefore. But as the problems which bedevil Western societies show, these auto-correctives do not prove sufficient to, the utilitarian calculus by itself fails to ensure either social cohesion or individual fulfillment.

That internal impulse to subserve to the whole, to abide by what is in the larger good has to be rooted in the traditions which have grown up in a particular society over ions. In the religions of the people, in the example of the lives of its great figures. We in India have been singularly fortunate in this regard: here alone the traditions have roots going back thousands of years, absolutely no other country has had so many luminescent figures as we have had in the last hundred and fifty years. Their lives embody the values on which that sense of the whole can be rebuilt. But these are the traditions, these are the very persons – Ramakrishna Paramhams, Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Lokmanya Tilak, Gandhiji, Ramana Maharishi, the Paramacharya, Narayan Guru – whom, as we have seen, our Macaulay-Missionary-Marx lot has had us repudiate.

The beginning of reconstruction, therefore, the *sine qua non* for it is to overturn the intellectual fashions set by these intellectuals, and defeat their verbal terrorism.

The changing balance

It happened for the third time – exactly as it had on the two previous occasions. First at a University in Delhi. Then at a lecture in Hyderabad. And this time at a public discussion in Calcutta. An academic of the Left got up and hurled the usual epithets at me: "Distortion", "Idiotic", "Ridiculous". And then, as befitted his profession, he dropped a name, so to say. Few in the audience would have heard of it – that is why it was the name to drop. But I could swear that as he lashed around, I was telling myself, "Why doesn't he hurry up and get to 'post-modernism'? !" And sure enough within minutes he was fuming, "As has been pointed out in post-modernist literature, there is a distinction between 'faith' and 'belief'...." What the distinction between the two words had to do with what I had said was not evident from his remarks, in any case what he said about the distinction would have been obvious to anyone who knew ordinary English and did not require the heavy artillery of "post-modernist literature". But "post-modernism" it was. Exactly as it had been in Delhi and at Hyderabad.

"It is their latest device for reducing facts to non-facts," explained another academic from the Calcutta University at dinner that evening. I had been struck by the other feature of the invoking – what was being hurled and invoked was just the latest intellectual fad from somewhere else.

But there has been great progress over the years. They

used to hurl Marx. And then Lenin. And then Stalin – yes, Stalin: two and a half sentences from an essay of his written in 1912 had been "the theoretical basis" for the Communists to embrace the demand for Pakistan. And then it was Mao. And then Lin Piao. And then Ho Chi Minh. And then Pol Pot. There was even a lot who would deem a point established once they had quoted Enver Hoxha of Albania. The names have changed over the years, but the habit has remained: just that the only *brahma-astra* they can now think of is "post-modernism" !

It is a habit that has affected the entire intellectual class in India, and no one more than the ones who have set the fashions for it – namely, the intellectuals of the Left. As I sat listening to the professor – and he was the head of an important social-science department at the University, we had been told – I was reminded of what their god of once-upon-a-time, Mao had said of their kind: "they who with pitiful industry have picked up scraps from the dung-heap of textbooks written abroad...."

And, mind you, the ones who have been most cravenly licking that dung-heap, the Leftists that is, have been the ones who have always been denouncing everyone else for being a cog of the "comprador culture", if not the actual agent of a foreign intelligence agency. That habit of dependence has till recently been fortified by a false confidence: the fact that they had been able to brow-beat others into silence through their verbal terrorism had given them that confidence. Both the habit and the confidence have now recoiled. They had "living" proof, they had been shouting for seventy years, they had the one proof which mattered, that of "practice": the decisive "reason" on account of which India must go Left was there for everyone to see: the great achievements of the Soviet Union – Unemployment? Abolished; Poverty? Abolished; Unhappy marriages? Abolished; Alcoholism? Abolished; Justice? Within reach of all, and purged of all class bias – the

technological excellence of Czechoslovakia, the miracle that Ceausescu had wrought – "The only debt free country in the world." In a word, the decisive reason in their favour, they insisted, was that Paradise had indeed been created *elsewhere*, and would just as certainly be created here in India if only India would follow the path that "The Only Fatherland" had blazed. But those claims, that *reason* – "The paradise *there*" reason – had been blown on the very test these great '"theoreticians" had said was the decisive test, the only test that mattered – the test of "practice".

Worse, the great Theory which was their pride, of which they said these achievements were a vindication, the great Theory which enabled them to have what no one else had – the soothsaying power, as well as the answer for everything – that is now nowhere. Even that loss need not have disabled them, but it has: having got so completely in the habit of relying on that "dung heap of textbooks written abroad," these stalwarts and theoreticians have completely lost the faculty to think for themselves. So they have to wait for someone to show them the direction in which to look next. But no new prophet has arisen to take the place of the ones whom events have cast on the very same "dung heap of history" onto which they were forever throwing everyone else. Nor is it just that no new prophet is in sight abroad who will tell them where they should proceed, the domestic messiahs they had rallied to have become millstones: the casteism that V. P. Singh inflamed, the casteism and corruption of Laloo Yadav's regime, the casteism, communalism and four-foot *lathis* of Mulayam Singh – it is becoming more and more embarassing to hold these persons up as exemplars of "social revolution".

The intellectuals thus have no option but to fall back on one of three things.

Just looking the other way: they just do not talk about the facts which have since come to be known about the Soviet Union, about the realities of Mao's rule, about the

economic stagnation and the environmental destruction in Eastern Europe. They talk even less than nothing about the reams and reams they were pouring out about these "glorious achievements of Socialism" till just six years ago. They do not talk, true. But the people notice that they no longer talk about those things, that when they now hurl some esoteric text at you it is "post-modernist literature", not Lenin or Stalin or Mao.

Second, they rely on going on repeating the fabrication. "But Mr. Shourie has completely ignored the violence the Hindus perpetrated on the Buddhists, the Hindus destroyed Buddhist *viharas*," the post-modernist declaimed in Calcutta. But there is an advantage. As their verbal terrorism had always worked in the past, they have not bothered to keep up with the results of modern scholarship. In Calcutta I drew attention to what I have recalled above – to what had happened when the indefatigable Sita Ram Goel had written to several Marxist historians to lead him to the evidence on which they were basing their assertion about Hindus having destroyed Buddhist *viharas*: the "historians" had been unable to produce a shred of evidence; what they had listed in their publications pointed the other way.

Just a few months earlier exactly the same assertion had been put forth by a leading Marxist theoretician during a public discussion in Hyderabad. I am not on the merits of the case at the moment, but on the fact that, when I had recalled these exchanges of Sita Ram Goel and the Marxist historians, neither the Marxist theoretician in Hyderabad nor the Marxist post-modernist in Calcutta had an answer. It is, of course, a comment on the state of affairs that such fabrications continue to remain the stock-in-trade of public discussion in India, but the advantage is just as apparent: these theoreticians and professors have not bothered to keep up with scholarly work on the subjects on which they declaim. They have, therefore, only to be confronted with the facts and their assertions fall.

The second device is the half-truth. At a public discussion in Hyderabad, in a hall packed to bursting, a progressive – Muslim – intellectual was trying to put the gloss of tolerance on Islam. The Quran recognises two classes of people, he told the audience: the ones who had not received the Revelation, and the *ahl-i-kitab*, the People of the Book, the ones to whom the Message had been revealed in a Book. It recognises the Jews, Christians and Muslims as being the *ahl-i-kitab*, he said. It is just that the Hindus were not known in Arabia at the time, he said, otherwise they too would have certainly been enumerated among the *ahl-i-kitab*, for they also have the Revealed Book in the *Vedas*. The Quran recognises a long succession of Prophets – from Abraham to Moses to Jesus to Muhammad, he said. It is just that the Buddha and Mahavir and other Indian saints were not known in Arabia at the time, otherwise there is no doubt that they too would have been listed as being among the prophets Allah had sent with the Message, he told the audience. As would Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus.

It sounds good, does it not? But just see what it implies. How does the fact that Hindus were not known in Arabia, or that Buddha and Mahavir were not known there come into the picture?, I asked. After all, the Quran is not supposed to have been written by some Arab, it is said to be the Word of Allah. The ordinary Arab may not have known about the Hindus, about the Buddha and Mahavir, but surely Allah did. And so, when He chose to enumerate only the Jews, Christians and Muslims as being the *ahl-i-kitab* and enjoined on the faithful eternal hostility towards the non-believers, surely that fact cannot be got around just by saying, "If Hindus, Buddha, Mahavir, had been known in Arabia...."

And about the Quran recognising a long line of prophets: but the same Quran states most emphatically, indeed this is its cardinal message that Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets. He was the Seal not just in the sense that he was the culmination in terms of excellence, he was the Seal in

the sense that he was the final one. He had perfected the Message, he had delivered it in its final and unalterable form. Buddha and Mahavir and Nanak are admissible only to the extent that what they said conforms to what the Prophet Muhammad said. To allow even that much is to be too generous: to the extent that they merely repeated what Muhammad said, they are redundant; to the extent that they said something different, they are to be spurned for they are distorting Allah's word. Exactly as, and for the same reason as Jews and Christians are to be shunned !

Surely, that is obvious. It would be obvious to the progressives too. Yet they put out the half-truth. Again the remedy is the same, and it is just as easy: we just have to know the facts in full, and point them out.

The situation thus is as follows: the ones who have dominated and controlled and terrorised public discourse for half a century in India are now bereft of facts, of arguments. The evidence is available to anyone who has access to their internal "dialogues" – they are talking to narrower and narrower circles; and in these ever-shrinking circles, they are just repeating the old clichés, there is not a new idea, there is not a new fact. And that is predictable, as we have seen: regurgitating those nostrums of The Theory is not just necessary, it is sufficient.

There is evidence to the same effect in the public domain also. Till just five-ten years ago, seminars and public meetings of intellectuals used to be the forte of the progressives, of the Marxists in particular. Today they are just not in a position to hold such meetings – not in Andhra, not in Kerala, not even in Calcutta. On the other hand, meetings of those who have liberated themselves from this point of view are jam-packed. When some progressive does come to one of these meetings, he cuts a sorry figure. He just reads out a speech which has been prepared and typed in advance, irrespective of what has been said by speakers before him, often irrespective of the topic itself; on other occasions he

just lets fly: those allusions to the esoteric – "post-modernist literature" – accompanied by strong and minatory words – "idiotic", "ridiculous". And thereby lives up to the description given by the prophet prior to Mao – that is, Lenin – of a person "trying to cover inconvenient facts beneath a shroud of angry words".

Thus, the balance of argument, of evidence, and most significantly of the public mood has shifted. Now is the time to seal it. For that, several steps ought to be taken.

First, in mapping change, in organising movements one must pay due attention to the importance of ideas and evidence. After all, as Communists etc. were able to secure such success with the aid of wrong, unsubstantiated ideas, with falsehoods, will it not be possible to do some good with better ideas backed by evidence?

Second, it is a complete error to lull oneself with the argument that "the people" do not need, they do not care for evidence and ideas. The claim that they had the great Theory in their possession, that all the evidence was on their side was an important element in the domination that these progressives were able to secure in public discourse, for instance. Ever so often, what grab the people are crude notions, true; but they are the crude versions of these ideas – and the claim that behind those simplified notions lies an entire Theory is a vital element in the success those crude notions secure. In any case, while the great avalanches of history may be affected by the people at large, decisions and discourse from month to month are in the hands of just a few thousand persons. These latter certainly are influenced by argument, reason, evidence. Therefore, work out the ideas, garner the relevant evidence to the last detail. And reach them at least to "the influentials".

The negative side of this task is as important. Just because "The Only Fatherland" of these theoreticians has collapsed, just because that collapse has taken the Theory down with it does not mean that they have been rendered harmless.

Their claims are hollowed, they have nothing to say, but they still control large parts of our academia and a very large part of the media, certainly the media in English. Therefore, at every opportunity they must be confronted with what has become known about the regimes they had held up to us as exemplars. They must be confronted with and requested to explain what they were writing till just six years ago. The lie that they repeat should not be shrugged off just because it is the same old lie: it must be nailed with evidence – each time, and as many times as it is repeated. As must every half-truth by which they seek to once again inveigle us into looking away.

Third, the factor which has enabled them to broadcast their concoctions, as we have seen through the example of the ICHR, has been their control of institutions. They have not used these institutions for the country. They have used these institutions to promote each other, to have a comfortable time. But that has been just a misdemeanour compared to their real crime: they have used these institutions to sow in the minds of our people the seeds of self-hatred. This hold has to be countered.

To do so we should change our laws and our pattern of incentives so that private individuals and groups get enthused to set up a multitude of foundations and institutions; the changes which are required are marginal, they are obvious – all that is required is faith in others: that we step out of the hangover of the socialist-days and have faith that those outside the State apparatus too are anxious to do good by the country. Second, we should loosen the hold over existing institutions of eminences of the kind we have surveyed here: and for this all that is necessary is to awaken people to what they have done with these institutions over the last twenty years.

Once again, the negative side of this lesson is just as important. If after purging these institutions of such entrepreneurs, some new group stuffs them with the same

sort, if it sets about to put the institutions to the same sort of use, it will inflict the same injury on the institutions, on scholarly work, and eventually on the cause it set out to advance. That is a warning for enthusiasts – and it is a reassurance for the rest of us: the hijacked institution swiftly loses its credibility, and with that its ability to do harm !

Even so a problem remains. For the first time after thirty-forty years scholarly work is again being done which brings out facts as they are. But it is not being allowed to reach large numbers. The reason is simple: much of the media, many universities, most of the controlling bodies remain in the hands of the same progressives, defunct though they be. That is a legacy of fifty years of perverted discourse and politics, of tenures, of their placing each other in positions of authority, of their speciality – networking. Even here the breach is of course evident: many in these institutions speak the truth in private, what they do not have as yet is the courage to speak it in the company of others. This cowardice will break one day all of a sudden: when the numbers have reached a critical mass, when some random event shows the persons how many they actually are. But for the time being the hold of the old intellectual terrorists remains an obstacle to the dissemination of new research.

This is where a marriage of many skills, of diverse resources is required. Resources to establish new research institutions which would be beyond the stranglehold of the progressives. Resources to start new publications which would not be held back by that intellectual cowardice. New, modern marketing methods by which the new publications can be reached to a wider circle of readers.

This is the next step we need: this jelling of diverse talents, of resources of different kinds.

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निन्दन्तु नीतिनिपुणाः यदि वा स्तुवन्तु।
लक्ष्मी समाविशतु गच्छतु वा यथेष्टम्।।
अद्यैव वा मरणमस्तु युगांतरे वा
न्याय्यात् पथात् प्रविचलन्ति पदं न धीराः।।

– नीतिशतक : भर्तृहरि

The wise may arraign or applaud
Wealth may flow in or vanish
as it will,
Death may occur today
or when the epoch ends
The steadfast never stray
from the path of righteousness

Bhartrihari in *Nitishatak*

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